

PETER SHAFFER'S DRAMATIC VISION OF THE FAILURE OF SOCIETY: A
STUDY OF *THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN*, *EQUUS* AND *AMADEUS*

by

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Peter Shaffer's Dramatic Vision of
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the Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus and
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ABSTRACT

Despite their popular acclaim, Peter Shaffer's three major plays, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*, have received relatively little scholarly attention. For the most part, critics have acknowledged their theatrical merits, but have considered them weak in content, regarding Shaffer primarily as a superb craftsman. However, a careful analysis demonstrates that these plays present a significant examination of the failure of society to provide the individual with spiritual fulfillment.

In each play the protagonist is a middle-aged man who has lost faith in the system which defines him. He searches, and he discovers a young man who displays unique individuality and a sense of the divine, manifested as the sun for Atahualpa, the horse for Alan, and the absolute beauty in music for Mozart. But because Pizarro, Dysart, and Salieri's previous lives have already shaped them, their discovery of divinely inspired youth can result only in an agonizing recognition of the barrenness of their existence. The dramatization of this spiritual quest is Shaffer's continuing obsession, from the late fifties, when he began working on *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, through the completion of *Amadeus* in 1979.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Peter Shaffer's three major plays, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus* and *Amadeus*, are enormously popular. *Amadeus*, as Daniel R. Jones observes, was "the most successful play" in the National Theatre's history in Britain, "surpassing his already highly successful full-length plays *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*."¹ The popularity of the three has reached far beyond Britain to a world wide audience of theatre goers, film goers, and readers. Furthermore, they are frequently chosen as textbooks for university drama courses.

Although they have won great popular acclaim, they have created controversy among professional theatre critics. Many tend to dismiss Shaffer's work as weak in content, attributing his popularity to spectacular theatricality. This kind of criticism has been directed towards each of the three. Robert Brustein, in an often quoted sentence on *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, stated that "...without spectacular theatricality, the play amounts to very little."² Jack Richardson wrote of *Equus*, "From the schematic psychology to the simple-minded cultural criticism, there is nothing in this play that either informs us what life is or what it ought to be. It is all contrivance, all middle-class whines and whimpers. ... And yet...I have to say

¹Daniel R. Jones, "Peter Shaffer's Continued Quest for God in *Amadeus*," *Comparative Drama*, 21 (Summer 1987), 145.

²Robert Brustein, *The Third Theatre* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 114.

that the presentation of this nonsense has a galling merit to it."³ And Jack Kroll believed that *Amadeus* is "a large voiced treatment of large themes whose essential superficiality is masked by skillful theatricality."⁴

Contrary to this view, other critics have affirmed the importance of Shaffer's ideas. The scholarly articles which deal with each of these plays sympathetically are few, and give a detailed treatment of only one or two at a time.⁵ Nevertheless, these few studies have discovered and praised the playwright's dramatisation of man's search for worship. Stacy believes that the attack of most critics on these three plays results from the critics' inability to define the plays' thematic core. Consequently, they miss Shaffer's original intention.⁶ However,

³Jack Richardson, "The English Invasion," *Commentary*, 59(February 1975), 78.

⁴Jack Kroll, "Mozart and His Nemesis," *Newsweek*, 29 December, 1980, 56. See also, Benedict Nightingale, *The Guardian*, 8 July 1964; Barry B. Witham, "The Anger in *Equus*," *Modern Drama*, 22 (March 1979), 66; John Simon, "Hippodrama at the Psychodrome," *The Hudson Review*, XXVIII, No. 1, Spring, 1975, 106.

⁵These articles include: Russell Vandenbroucke, "Equus: Modern Myth in the Making," *Drama and theatre*, XII(Spring 1975), 129-133; James R. Stacy, "The Sun and the Horse: Peter Shaffer's Search for Worship," *Educational Theatre Journal*, 4(Oct. 1976), 325-37; Barbara Lounsberry, "'God-Hunting': The Chaos of Worship in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*," *Modern Drama*, 21(Mar. 1978), 13-28; Gene A. Plunka, "The Existential Ritual: Peter Shaffer's *Equus*," *Kansas Quarterly*, XII(Fall 1980), 87-97; C.J. Gianakaris, "A Playwright Looks at Mozart: Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*," *Comparative Drama*, XV(Spring 1981), 37-53. Daniel R. Jones, "Peter Shaffer's Continued Quest for God in *Amadeus*," *Comparative Drama*, 21(Summer 1987), 145-155; Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf, "On the Structure of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*," *Modern Drama*, 27(1987), 299-313.

⁶Stacy, 325-6.

a few others, basing their views on an appreciation of Shaffer's dramatization of ideas, consider him as the leading playwright of our time. In his comment on *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Norman Nadel asserts that "No Englishman in this century, save Shaw and Christopher Fry, has achieved such sensible beauty, such noble clarity of ideas. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* might well be a masterpiece"⁷; Russell Vandembroucke considers *Equus* "a finely wrought statement, redolent with meaning, certain to be performed and remembered for generations to come"⁸; and Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf say of *Amadeus* that "there is a degree of thematic and structural complexity to *Amadeus* which makes it, beyond its sensational popularity, a dramatic masterpiece in its own right."⁹

While the latter group of critics have cast significant light upon each of these plays individually, there has not yet been a detailed analysis which examines and compares all three. Such an examination and comparison needs to be done, for, as Dennis A Klein observes, "One of the beauties of Peter Shaffer's theatre is the relationship among his plays; with each new play Shaffer's concerns are repeated, but they become broader, their treatment deeper." And he suggests that the three plays may well be considered a trilogy.¹⁰ Such a study would reveal the direct

⁷Norman Nadel, *New York World Telegram*, 27 Oct. 1965.

⁸Russell Vandembroucke, 133.

⁹Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf, 312.

¹⁰Dennis A. Klein, "The Third Part of Peter Shaffer's Dramatic Trilogy," *Modern Language Studies*, XIII, No 1 (Winter 1983), 38.

correspondence between the thematic core of these plays and the playwright's consistent personal obsession. The continuity of Shaffer's dramatisation of his obsession explains the striking similarities between plays whose historical settings are radically different and may help explain the nature of the popularity Shaffer has enjoyed with all three.

In the transformation of his personal experience into dramatic terms, Shaffer is aware of various current theatrical developments and has effectively employed them for his own purpose. Each of the three plays represents his "theatre of ritual and masks and cries and ritual magic, incorporating music."¹¹ It is the kind of theatre that Shaffer has intended to create right from the early years of his career in the late fifties when he began working on *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. And as Michael Hinden notes, within a period of thirty years, he has become the best known theatrical craftsman:

Shaffer is without peer among contemporary dramatists in exploiting the theatre's full range of expressive means, including such devices as mime, masks, gesture, music, elaborate costuming, color, special lighting, and auditory effects.¹²

However, while Shaffer does pay much attention to the use of various theatrical means, he nevertheless firmly believes that the most important way of conveying ideas in theatre is words. Following a discussion of total theatre in an interview, he

¹¹Brian Connell, "The Two Sides of Theatre's Agonized Perfectionist," *The Times*, 28 April 1980, 7.

¹²Michael Hinden, "Trying to Like Shaffer," *Comparative Drama*, 19(Spring 1985), 14.

stated:

However, none of this means that the words do not come first. With me, they do always-and on a bare stage they become even more important.¹³

Consequently, it is important for us to direct our attention to the texts of the plays, in order to illustrate specifically Shaffer's contributions to their success rather than his directors'. Shaffer himself has generously given credit to those directors,¹⁴ but critics who view his major works as theatrically sound and dramatically weak go too far in implicitly giving more credit to the directors than to the playwright.

An analysis of the texts reveals that in each of the three plays Shaffer expresses in different settings and with different characters his attitude toward a wide range of social establishments, traditions and conventions, and their impact upon the individual. Though *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Amadeus* are historical plays, they point, like *Equus*, directly to the basic concerns of modern man, who questions the existence of the Christian God while his religious instinct still remains. In other words, modern man, dissatisfied with the secular existence in which he is moulded by social conventions, finds his life meaningless, and desires to transcend it by filling himself with a sense of the divine. The tensions produced by

¹³Peter Shaffer, "To See the Soul of a Man," *New York Times*, 24 October 1985, 22.

¹⁴Peter Shaffer, "Acknowledgement," *Amadeus* (London: André Deutsch, 1980), 7.

this situation are tensions within Shaffer's own mind and prove to be the constant dominating all the three major plays.

The selection of the material used to dramatize this obsession is incidental. Shaffer, to suit his own purpose, has invented his own characters, though not entirely without historical basis. The writing of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, as Shaffer reveals, came about "when I had to spend a few weeks in bed, and decided to while away the time reading some big, heavy Victorian book. The book I chose was Prescott's *The Conquest of Peru* and I was absolutely riveted by it."¹⁵ As for *Equus*, Shaffer's interest was aroused by a story James Mossman of the BBC told him while they were driving in the countryside, a story of a boy blinding 26 horses.¹⁶ In the case of *Amadeus*, it "began idly when I [Shaffer] was reading an account of a storm at the burial of Mozart which drove mourners away but which is not mentioned in the Vienna meteorological records."¹⁷

Shaffer pays little attention to historical accuracy in terms of his protagonists' spiritual quest. Dysart is entirely his own invention, and Pizarro and Salieri are basically so. As he states in his note on *Equus*, "I am grateful now I have never received confirmed details of the real story, since my concern

¹⁵John Russell Taylor, "Shaffer and the Incas," *Plays and Players*, April 1964, 12.

¹⁶Peter Shaffer, *Equus* (Penguin, 1977), 9.

¹⁷Colin Chambers, "Psychic Energy," *Plays and Players*, February 1980, 13.

has been more and more with a different kind of exploration."¹⁸
The above statement can also be applied to the two historical plays as well, particularly with regard to his protagonists and the young men to whom they relate. Concerning *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, he explains:

Francisco Pizarro, as he is in the play, is largely invention. I did a great deal of research, of course, read many histories of Peru and the Conquistadors. But there is very little documentation of Pizarro's character. It is historically true that Pizarro, after the death of Atahualpa, sat weeping in the street in Cajamarca. I learned that from a footnote. That's not at all in character with the picture we get of Pizarro from the histories as a ruthless Conquistador. There is no historical explanation, but something about Atahualpa must have touched Pizarro. It is not clear what the relationship was, and I've invented all that.¹⁹

With regard to *Amadeus*, Shaffer states:

"I tried to write a play, not history. What the play is trying to do is give an interpretation of history....All the elements of the play are as near to the facts as I could verify. Then I try to work them into a dramatic climax. The confrontation of Mozart and Salieri could have happened."²⁰

In an interview Shaffer makes it clear that what concerns him most is the dramatisation of his personal obsession:

There is in me a continuous tension between what I suppose I could loosely call the Apollonian and the Dionysiac sides of interpreting life, between, say, Dysart and Alan Strang. It immediately begins to sound high falutin', when one talks about it oneself- I don't really see it in those dry intellectual terms. I just feel in myself that there is a constant debate going on between the violence of instinct on the one hand and the

¹⁸Shaffer, 9.

¹⁹Barbara Gelb, "...And Its Author," *New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1965, Sec. II, 2.

²⁰Harold C. Schoenberg, "Mozart's World: From London to Broadway," *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 1980, Sec. II, 35.

desire in my mind for order and restraint. Between the secular side of me the fact that I have never been able to buy anything of official religion- and the inescapable fact that to me a life without a sense of the divine is perfectly meaningless.²¹

What Shaffer means by "a sense of the divine" is an escape from the destructive confines of social establishments, normality and dominant order, to the creation of a personal concrete object of passionate worship in order to give meaning to one's mundane existence. In *Equus*, Dysart, the character Shaffer employs to expound his insight into the state of modern man, says:

'Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus-no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like, and slate roofs-just as of certain frowns in people and slouches'...I'd say to them-'Worship as many as you can see and more will appear!'²²

This idea of a multiplicity of gods is central to Shaffer's idea of worship, and contrasts sharply with the views of conventional religion. The individual's creation of his own god is, as Pizarro utters in his final realization of the importance of the created object of worship, "some immortal business."²³ The divine, manifested as the sun for Atahualpa, the horse for Alan and the absolute beauty in music for Mozart, is in each of the three plays an individual creation suited to a particular need

²¹Connell, 7.

²²Shaffer, *Equus*, 62.

²³Peter Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 80.

for spiritual worship. Shaffer's objects of worship are tangible, visible and sensible, not in any way related to social convention or needs. As he explains in an interview:

I think religious belief is something one has to discover for oneself, to make for oneself. One makes religion as one makes love -I am always fascinated by the expression 'making love'. You make it, it is something to create for oneself, and I think religion is something you create yourself. You just don't receive a set of principles, then say-that makes me a Christian, and that makes me a Catholic and so on. I can't understand that.²⁴

As he reveals in another interview, this idea of religious belief results from his personal experience:

I was born Jewish-though how a child can be born into any religion, I don't see. You can only be born the child of your parents-not a Jew or a Christian. That's imposed upon you. It's a strange and sad thing that you have to spend so much time unlearning the damaging things you were taught-in all good faith on the part of your parents-as a child.²⁵

To Shaffer, conventional religion is "totally ridiculous,"²⁶ and he shares the belief of one of his characters that God is "something right outside the universe and essentially irrelevant to it and to everyday dealings in the world."²⁷ Not only is the Christian faith irrelevant; it is also harmful, for instead of providing the individual with a sense of the divine, it devalues the temporal sphere and looks

²⁴Peter Adam, "Peter Shaffer on Faith, Farce, and Masks," *The Listener*, 14 Oct. 1976, 476.

²⁵Gelb, "...And Its Author," 4.

²⁶Barry Pree, "Peter Shaffer," *Transatlantic Review*, Autumn 1963, 64.

²⁷Taylor, 12.

for a better world in a timeless beyond. It denies reality to the world we live in, the world of the senses, of change, and opposition; and degrades it into a secondary world of semblance and illusion. To Shaffer, conventional religions are detrimental because, as James R. Stacy remarks, "they lock men into predetermined, structured worship and lives without regard to the reality of self: the multiplicity of self, which demands a multiplicity of gods."²⁸ Shaffer is distressed by the way man:

constantly trivializes the immensity of his experience; the way, for example, he canalizes the greatness of his spiritual awareness into the second-rate formula of a Church-any church: how he *settles* for a Church or Shrine or Synagogue; how he demands a voice, a law, an oracle, and over and over again puts into the hands of other men the reins of repression and the whip of Sole Interpretation. To me the greatest tragic factor in History is man's apparent need to mark the intensity of his reaction to life by joining a band. For a band, to give itself definition, must find a rival or an enemy.²⁹

Shaffer openly states that "I resent deeply all churches, I despise them. No church or shrine or synagogue has ever failed to misuse its power."³⁰ However, Joan F. Dean rightly observes that his specific "target is the basic structure of modern life and its diminished capacity to channel constructively man's spiritual impulses."³¹ Shaffer believes that "The immense

²⁸Stacy, 337.

²⁹Peter Shaffer, "To See the Soul of a Man," *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 1965, Sec. II, 3.

³⁰Gelb, 2, 4.

³¹Joan F. Dean, "Shaffer's Recurrent Character Type," *Modern Drama*, XXI (Sep. 1978), 299.

immediacy of experience is largely dead."³² The causes that have led modern man to such a condition are a combination of various social forces and influences. Shaffer considers it "partly a social thing, partly the way one's been brought up, partly the whole confluence of repressions that bear down on one from the moment one's born."³³ In his three major plays, Shaffer has detailed the destructiveness of various social forces and institutions, all of which pursue convention, normality and order. He has condemned their intellectual foundation by having his protagonists, who are their representatives, attack them from within.

Each of the protagonists is very successful socially. Pizarro is the already established world explorer; Dysart, a highly respected psychiatrist; and Salieri, the favored court composer of his time. However in their middle age, at the peak of their worldly success, they have come to realize the emptiness of their existence and each longs for a sense of the divine, without which they all feel their life "is perfectly meaningless." The greatest tragedy for them all is that they are trapped by their previous life, unable to create their own objects of passionate worship, yet knowing all the while that life could be magical and powerful as they have observed in their counterparts, the young men who have created their own

³²Peter Shaffer, "Artaud for Artaud's sake," a discussion by Shaffer, Peter Hall, Peter Brook, and Michel Saint-Denis, *Encore*, 11(May-June 1964), 24.

³³Shaffer, "Artaud for Artaud's sake," 24-5.

objects of worship. Spiritually they have been castrated by the process of their socialisation, and in turn on behalf of society, they are castrating others who are still pure, innocent and untainted. Their failure to find meaning in life results from their inability to completely divorce themselves from false social standards, and create and accept what is proper for themselves.

Shaffer's attack on social forces is not confined to any particular social system. He applies his personal vision universally, a vision which says basically that society destroys the individual by depriving him of his sense of who he is. The individual has lost his sense of immediate experience, and his instinctual power is thwarted. In his three major plays through dramatizing the creation of the individualized object of worship by the young, innocent characters, Shaffer celebrates the greatness of man's immediate experience, his instinctual and intuitive powers, and all those non-rational forces within him. Through the destruction, physical or spiritual, of the young characters and the spiritual despair suffered by the old, Shaffer illustrates not only how destructive the social forces are, but also how urgent man's need is for a sense of the divine.

In the three plays, by consistently and systematically focusing on the tension between society and the individual, Shaffer has successfully transformed his personal obsession into a public event. Although he has given no solution to the

conflict, he has offered deep insight.

CHAPTER II

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MAN

The Royal Hunt of the Sun is Shaffer's first major play in terms of both theatricality and thematic importance. Here, Shaffer begins his "theatre of ritual and masks and cries and ritual magic, incorporating music" for the purpose of creating "an experience that was *entirely and only theatrical*."¹ Thematically, it also marks the beginning of his series of dramatizations of man's desperate quest for a sense of the divine in a world that is dominated by social institutions, normality and the established order.

Though written in the late fifties, because of high production costs the play was not performed until the Chichester Festival on July 6, 1964. It was brought to New York on October 26, 1965. Although most critics who wrote on the play praised it highly for its theatrical spectacle, they differed in their views of its thematic content. Some believed that the play was weak in content. Typical of this view is Robert Brustein's remark quoted earlier that "... without spectacular theatricality, the play amounts to very little." In contrast other critics presented an overwhelmingly positive view. Bernard Levin stated that "No greater play has been written and produced in our language in my life time. That is a large statement and

¹ Shaffer, "Introduction" to *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (New York, 1964)

it is a large play that calls it forth."²

Although *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is a historical play based on William Prescott's *The History of the Conquest of Peru*,³ it is nevertheless "a contemporary story which uses history only as a groundwork to the expression of its theme." Its dramatic core is "the search for God" or "the search for a definition of the idea of God,"⁴ as seen in the protagonist's mental obsession and his confrontation with Atahualpa. Pizarro, the protagonist, is a nihilist who finds no meaning in established institutions such as state, church and army, institutions which have elevated him as a world famous explorer. Consequently, he finds no meaning in his life. Already in his late middle age and physically exhausted, he feels the urgent need to achieve spiritual fulfillment, and is engaged in a desperate search. While the confrontation between the Spaniards and the Incas is historical, Pizarro's spiritual quest is very much the concern of a modern man who has rejected the formerly accepted values and has not found new ones.

The play consists of two acts, each of which is divided into short scenes. In the first act, Shaffer describes the motives and various aims of the Spanish conquistadors, and singles out

²Bernard Levin, *Daily Mail*, 9 Dec. 1964.

³ William Prescott, *The History of the Conquest of Peru* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1886)

⁴Shaffer, interviewed by John Russell Taylor, *Plays and Players*, April, 1964.

Pizarro, who is both the product of the Spanish culture and an individual separated from the rest of his group by his intellectual concerns. In the second act, the playwright leads his audience through the three stages of the core of the drama: Pizarro's confrontation with Atahualpa, his belief that he has found what he has been searching for, and his loss of that belief.

Shaffer uses a narrator who participates in the action and directly addresses the audience, a technique borrowed from Brecht. The narrator is Old Martin, a sixteenth century figure, dressed in "the black costume of a Spanish hidalgo."⁵ He is the last surviving member of Pizarro's force, and is talking to Shaffer's modern audience more than two generations after his experiences in the Spanish conquest of Peru. His prominent appearance in the play itself as Young Martin, allows Shaffer to bring to life a long forgotten piece of history with an insight that is intimate and authentic. In his opening remark, Old Martin informs the audience:

This story is about ruin. Ruin and gold. More gold than any of you will ever see even if you work in a counting house. I am going to tell how one hundred and sixty-seven men conquered an empire of twenty-four million. And then things that no one has ever told: things to make you groan and cry out I'm lying. And perhaps I am. The air of Peru is cold and sour like in a vault, and wits turn easier here even than in Europe. But grant me this: I saw him closer than any one, and had cause only to love him. He was my altar, my bright image of salvation. Francisco Pizarro! Time was when I'd have died for him, or for any worship(1).

⁵Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 17. All the subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of this chapter.

Old Martin's remark is followed by a reenactment of the story. He introduces various characters, locates them in different places and times, provides the information that is necessary to our understanding of particular situations, bridges the gap between scenes, and through it all expresses what he felt at the time.

To justify Pizarro's spiritual quest, Shaffer first tells us how meaningless life can be when it is determined by a society which allows the individual no life of his own and condemns him to follow an already defined routine. The damage done to the individual is so destructive that even when he realizes the deceptive values imposed upon him by society, he is not able to break away from them.

The meaninglessness of human existence and the need for spiritual fulfillment are drawn with clarity through Pizarro's journey both physical and spiritual. When he first appears on stage, he is already a man in his late middle age. He has made "two expeditions to the New World" and shown the King enough gold to get the sole right of discovery in Peru and the title of Viceroy over anything he conquered"(92). Despite the wealth and position he has achieved, his previous life has made him an old cynic, to whom "things become what they really are"(7). The goals that others in the Spanish conquest try to achieve such as gold, territory for one's country and religious conquest, are no longer enough for him. He uses gold as his bait to recruit soldiers in his poverty-stricken native village in Spain. He

himself regards it as mere metal, something which is not enough for him to endure the hardships of the expedition.

At his age, he has also gained considerable insight into the social institutions of state, church and army. As his dialogue with De Soto reveals, he is extremely bitter toward Spain:

Pizarro: My country, where is that?

De Soto: Spain, Sir.

Pizarro: Spain and I have been strangers since I was a boy. The only spot I know in it is here--this filthy village. This is Spain to me. Is this where you wish me comfort? For twenty-two years I drove pigs down this street because my father couldn't own mother! Twenty-two years without a single day of hope(7).

As for the army he believes that:

Army loyalty is blasphemy. The world of soldiers is a yard of ungrowable children. They play with ribbons and make up ceremonies just to keep out the rest of the world. They add up the number of their blue dead and their green dead and call that their history. But all this is just the flower the bandit carves on his knife before shoving it into a man's side...What's army tradition? Nothing but years of us against them. Christ-men against Pagan-men. Men against men(10-11).

As for the church he says in indignation:

Dungballs to all churches that are or ever could be! How I hate you. Kill who I bid you kill and I will pardon it! You with your milky fingers forcing in the blade. How dare you priests bless any man who goes slicing into battle(71)?

As for the established institutions, Pizarro believes they are there because "men cannot just stand as men in this world. It's too big for them and they grow scared. So they build them shelters against the bigness, do you see? They call the shelters Court, Army, Church. They are useful against loneliness, Martin, but they are not true"(10).

Pizarro's statements about the established institutions are clearly justified by the behaviour of those who stand for them. The court, with its greed for territory and a share in the booty, is represented by Estate, who is characterized by his fanatic patriotism and zealous sense of duty towards the crown. According to him, "If you serve a King you must kill personal ambition. Only then can you become a channel between the people and its collective glory"(16). Yet the irony is that he is not a man without personal ambition, as we see in his attempt to place himself in a position of supreme authority above Pizarro, whom he despises for lack of breeding. He feels that it is a personal insult that the King has awarded the command of the expedition to Pizarro, whom he regards as a dangerous madman(17).

The church is represented by the village priest, Valverde, whose interest in the expedition is not only to convert the pagan Incas, but also to support the Spanish looting of the Inca people by absolving the former "of all the crimes" they "ever committed"(5). He has little doubt that the right of conquest carries with it the right to convert, and is ready to use whatever means available to achieve his purpose, even to the extent of using religious bribery. His passion to convert is so great that when he feels that either the name of God or his own authority has suffered challenge or insult, he becomes relentless and more than ready to employ ultimate cruelty(38).

Although Pizarro stands in opposition to these social institutions, he is very much a product of them. When he was

young, because of his illegitimacy, society denied him those privileges he would have otherwise enjoyed. The only thing he got from Spain is the idea that "we are born greedy for possessions"(20). Impelled by this idea, by his own efforts he has won himself wealth and position. But at the same time, his past experience with the state, church and army makes him realize the meaninglessness of those very institutions, which have determined the direction of his life. They have deprived him of his sense of joy, and by stripping him of any conventional faith, they have offered him the futility of his own existence. As a result, his soul is frostbitten, his heart hardened, and his mind lacking any calmness.

Though a sixteenth century conquistador, Pizarro is confronted with philosophical problems of a twentieth century man. He has lost his belief in traditional values and goals, yet cannot bear this life of suffering and pain without the hope of a truer and better world which he senses is there. Because he is a strong individual, he does not give in to the futility of human existence, even though he recognizes and turns against the artificial and deceptive values of tradition. He goes on searching for spiritual fulfillment, exhausted in body, but not in spirit. We see him fully committed to his search for a way to conquer time and the inevitability of death.

Despite his full awareness that society's values are deceptive and destructive, Pizarro does not simply reject those values. Instead, he takes advantage of them for his own purpose.

When recruiting soldiers for the expedition, he uses the villagers' socially determined hunger for gold to attract them.

...why should you endure all this? Because I believe that beyond this terrible place is a kingdom, where gold is as common as wood is here! I took only two steps in and found cups and pans made out of it solid(4).

He also employs the church as a justification for his army's crimes, by having the village priest, Valverde, explain:

Don't think we are merely going to destroy his people and lift their wealth. We are going to take from them what they don't value, and give them instead the priceless mercy of heaven. He who helps me lift this dark man into light I absolve of all crimes he ever committed(5).

In the name of Spain Pizarro directs his band of robbers and accepts his role as the most powerful figure in the expedition, dismissing Estate to an inferior position, and placing De Soto in second place.

In the name of Spain our Holy Country, I invest you as second in command to me(8).

Shaffer makes it quite obvious that Pizarro is willingly the first among the Spanish robbers, yet different from all of them in his intention.

At the beginning of the expedition, Pizarro, old and cynical, reveals that his intention is fame, and that fame is a private purpose:

If I live this next year I'm going to get a name that won't ever be forgotten. A name to be sung here for centuries in your ballads,...(7)

However, later while he is in Peru, we find that his quest changes. He realizes that fame is something he can win but death is far more difficult to conquer. "Fame is long. Death is

longer"(30). Once he believed he was never going to die. Now that he has become old, he is aware that death is approaching him, and his feeling of futility increases. The material wealth he has gathered and the position he has achieved are seen now as nothing but a waste of his efforts, for time in its passing will deprive him of everything.

Everything we feel is made of Time. All the beauties of life are shaped by it. Imagine a fixed sunset: the last note of a song that hung an hour, or a kiss for half of it. Try and halt a moment in our lives and it becomes maggots at once. Even that word 'moment' is wrong, since that would mean a speck of time, something you could pick up on a rag and peer at...But that's the awful trap of life. You can't escape maggots unless you go with Time, and if you go, they wriggle in you anyway(31).

Consequently, while still struggling for fame, he is desperate in his search for a way to conquer death by giving his life meaning, and meaning for him is to be one with nature, as we can see in his description of the best moment of his life.

I had a girl once, on a rock by the Southern Ocean. I lay with her one afternoon in winter, wrapped up in her against the cold, and the sea fowl screaming, and it was the best hour of my life. I felt then that sea-water, and bird-droppings and the little pits in human flesh were all linked together for some great end right out of the net of words to catch. Not just my words, but anyone's(31).

To Pizarro, the atheist, the Christian God is beyond the universe, and thus irrelevant. Pizarro is seeking something concrete, tangible, not supersensuous, something that will help him understand the mystery of the universe, and lead somewhere that will keep him immortal. Although time has deprived him of the sense of being one with nature and thus part of some great end which is not describable in words, still the recycling of

nature, the rising and falling of the sun, all such eternal recurrences, make him believe that there exists a source of life and wonder if he could find it:

When I was young, I used to sit on the slope outside the village and watch the sun go down, and I used to think: if only I could find the place where it sinks to rest for the night, I'd find the source of life, like the beginning of a river. I used to wonder what it could be like. Perhaps an island, a strange place of white sand, where the people never died. Never grew old, or felt pain, and never died(32).

In Peru, while the rest of the expedition finds gold, new territory and people to convert, Pizarro believes that he has found the place he has been searching for, and it seems to him that in Atahualpa he has found an answer to the mystery of life.

Shaffer presents the Inca civilization in such a way that it seems to be the object of Pizarro's quest, "the source of life" for it appeals to his sense of the existence of a deeper reality. The Incas are depicted as part of nature. They are given certain jobs at a certain age, they do certain things in certain seasons, and they are bound by natural laws and live in peace and prosperity:

Headman: It is the seventh month. That is why they must pick corn.

Atahualpa: (*Intoning*) In the eighth month you will plough. In the ninth, sow maize. In the tenth, mend your roofs.

Headman: Each age also has its tasks.

Atahualpa: Nine years to twelve, protect harvests.

Twelve to eighteen, care for herds. Eighteen to twenty-five, warriors for me-Atahualpa Inca! At twenty-five all will marry. All will receive one tupu of land.

Headman: What may be covered by one hundred pounds of maize.

Atahualpa: They will never move from there. At birth of a son one more tupu will be given. At birth of a daughter, half a tupu. At fifty all people will leave work forever and be fed in honour till they die(19-20).

In the Inca king's Empire there is no division of secular, practical and spiritual life. Thus, the headman who directs the work of one thousand families cares for all the needs of these people: clothes, land, food, and spiritual comfort. He explains to the Priest De Nizza:

Headman: Here all work together in families: fifty, a hundred, a thousand. I am head of a thousand families. I give out to all food. I give out to all clothes. I give out to all confessing.

De Nizza: Confessing?

Headman: I have priest power...I confess my people of all crimes against the laws of the sun(19).

The unity of man and nature in the Inca empire is finally typified by its highest sovereign, Atahualpa, who is at the same time both the king and the object of spiritual worship as the symbol of the sun. Atahualpa claims that he is of solar descent. With a firm belief in his divine origin, he conducts himself with assurance and self-confidence. The people unquestioningly accept him as the sun incarnate, glorifying and deifying him as a god on earth, attributing to him omniscience, infallibility and immortality. These qualities link him directly with the sun, the tangible and visible god of the Incas, whose warmth embraces their land and matures their crops. Like the all seeing sun, Atahualpa has an eye for everything in his empire:

De Soto: How then can he make sure so many are happy over so large a land?

Headman: His messengers run light and dark, one after one, over four great roads. No one else may move on

them. So he has eyes everywhere. He sees you now.

Pizarro: Now?

Atahualpa: Now(20)!

As son of the sun, Atahualpa believes that he is immortal, just like the sun that rises in the morning and declines in the evening in eternally recurrent motion. His priest informs Pizarro that "Atahualpa is his [the sun's] child sent to shine on us for a few years of life. Then he will return to his father's Palace and live forever" (14).

In his direct confrontation with the Spanish priest, Valverde, Atahualpa refutes the Christian God with the argument that "a God cannot be killed. See my father. You cannot kill him. He lives forever and looks over his children everyday"(37). And when he realizes that it is inevitable that the Spaniards will kill him, he firmly states that as the son of the sun, he is immortal.

Only my father can take me from here. And he would not accept me killed by men like you. Men with no word. You may be King in this land, but never God. I am God of the Four Quarters and if you kill me tonight I will rise at dawn when my Father first touches my body with light(74).

Along with presenting in Atahualpa a unique spiritual bond between man and nature, Shaffer also compares and contrasts his qualities with those of Pizarro, making the relationship between the two characters an intense one both dramatically and thematically. While the rest of his men have found gold, Pizarro believes that he has found in Peru "the strange place of white sand" and in Atahualpa "the people" who "never died", for Atahualpa's vision posits an indestructable relationship

between man and the universe around him. Here Pizarro's nihilistic attitude diminishes temporarily, for he finds more meaning in the Inca religion than he ever found in Christianity, and he comes to believe that perhaps the Inca has the answer to questions the white man has never been able to solve.

I myself can't fix anything nearer to a thought of worship than standing at dawn and watching it [the sun] fill the world. Like the coming of something eternal, against going flesh. What a fantastic wonder that anyone on earth should dare to say: 'That's my father. My father: the sun!' ...since first I heard of him I've dreamed of him every night. A black king with glowing eyes, sporting the sun for a crown. What does it mean(32-33)?

The importance of the meeting between Pizarro and Atahualpa is emphasized by Shaffer's presentation of Pizarro as a hollow man. Pizarro directly addresses De Soto and indirectly the audience:

Only that of all meetings I have made in my life, this with him is the one I have to make. Maybe it's my death. Or maybe new life. I feel just this: all my days have been a path to this one morning(33).

Indeed the meeting is a matter of life and death to Pizarro in a spiritual sense. Pizarro regards Atahualpa as a man who " has some meaning for me, this Man-God. An immortal man in whom all his people live completely. He has an answer for time"(45). In their mutual explorations of each other, Pizarro and Atahualpa discover that both of them are illegitimate children. In Pizarro's case, because of his illegitimacy society has deprived him of all the comforts to which he is entitled. He has not been able to find a suitable woman to marry and has been held in contempt. Because he is a product of the Spanish culture he himself cannot

shed the psychological burden of this contempt.

In contrast to Pizarro, Atahualpa believes that "to be born so is the sign for a great man"(55), an idea eagerly accepted by Pizarro. Atahualpa further helps Pizarro overcome his sense of inferiority by offering him one of his earrings which is to the Incas, the "sign of a nobleman"(55). As Atahualpa's companion, Pizarro is filled with a sense of being noble and distinguished. The change is made obvious when Shaffer has Pizarro say "(In sudden wonder.) You made me laugh!"(55) That is, Atahualpa has given him a sense of joy and happiness that has long been lost to him.

The illegitimacy of both men is seen not only in their birth, but also in their attitudes toward religion. Pizarro, though in name a Catholic, is in nature an atheist. Shaffer's previously quoted comments on his own religious experience clearly explain Pizarro's attitudes towards religion:

I was born Jewish-though how a child can be born into any religion, I don't see. You can only be born the child of your parents-not a Jew or Christian. That's imposed upon you. It's a strange and sad thing that you have to spend so much time unlearning the damaging things you were taught-in all good faith on the part of your parents as a child.

At the age of sixty-three, Pizarro has come to reject the values society imposed upon him, and is trying to find something more meaningful. Atahualpa is quick to discern this.

Pizarro: You said you'd hear the Holy Men.
Atahualpa: They are fools.
Pizarro: They are not fools.
Atahualpa: Do you believe them?
Pizarro: For certain.

Atahualpa: Look into me.

Pizarro: Your eyes are smoking wood.

Atahualpa: You do not believe them.

Pizarro: You dare not say that to me...

Atahualpa: You do not believe them. Their God is not in your face(53).

Pizarro's spiritual void, and the Inca's firm belief in his divine origin, draw the two closer and closer. Soon Pizarro gains his sense of joy, and he becomes an altered man. "No one's ever seen him so easy. He spends hours each day with the King"(57). The two are found practising fighting together, with Pizarro teaching Atahualpa. And when the Inca is amazed by the written signs, and also learns that Pizarro is illiterate, he declares emphatically that "a King needs it. There is great power in these marks. You [young Martin] are the King in this room. You must teach us two. We will learn together-like brothers"(61). Yet what holds Pizarro to Atahualpa most is that Atahualpa to him represents the newly found worship, the joy in life. Pizarro finds that Atahualpa's belief is:

the only way to give life meaning! To blast out of time and live forever, *us*, in our own persons. This is the law: die in despair or be a God yourself!... Look at him: always so calm as if the teeth of life never bit him... or the teeth of death. What if it was really true, Martin? That I've gone God hunting and caught one. A being who can renew his life over and over(75)?

And mere moments later, Shaffer has Pizarro further express his belief in his definition of the idea of a god.

What else is a God but what we know we can't do without? The flowers that worship it, the sun flowers in their soil, are us after night, after cold and lightless days, turning our faces to it, adoring. the sun is the only God I know! We eat you to walk. We drink you to sing. Our reins loosen under you and we laugh. Even I laugh, here (75-6)!

Although in a sense Pizarro's spiritual void has given him the freedom to search for his own god, he enjoys no freedom in actuality. Pizarro now is thrown into a dilemma over the fate of Atahualpa. As a leader of the Spanish band, he has to care for the lives of his soldiers, and furthermore he still desires the fame he had in mind when he first started the expedition. He is also still limited by the social forces of the state and the church. His dilemma is revealed in his argument with De Soto concerning the fate of Atahualpa.

De Soto: (To Pizarro) Mutiny's smoking. Act now or it'll be a blaze you'll not put out.

Pizarro: What do I do?

De Soto: Take our chances, what else can we do? You have to let him go.

Pizarro: And what happens then? A tiny army is wiped out in five minutes, and the whole story lost for always.

Later someone else will conquer Peru and no one will even remember my name(69).

Although he is worried about the safety of his soldiers and that worry is primarily for the sake of his own name, he still cares more for Atahualpa, the man to whom he promised life. But the state and the church are joined together, determined to kill Atahualpa. Estate, the royal officer, tells Pizarro:

The issue is simple. You are Viceroy here ruling in the name of the King who sent you. You have no right to risk his land for any reason at all(70).

After the state makes its point, the church comes to inform Pizarro of its own reasons for eliminating Atahualpa. Valverde tries to persuade him:

My son, listen to me. No promise to a pagan need bind a Christian. Simply think what's at stake: the lives of a hundred and seventy of the faithful. Are you going to sacrifice them for one savage(71)?

The gentle priest, De Nizza, who is initially impressed by the beauty of the Quechua language and the contentedness of the Inca people, now also joins with Estate and Valverde, and demands the death of the Inca king. His condemnation is based on the conviction that the land of the Incas is a living hell, for the freedom of the individual spirit is deliberately suppressed by the rulers of Peru so that there can be no spontaneous expression of love or even awareness of real happiness, since unhappiness is unknown.

De Nizza: Peru is a sepulchre of the soul. For the sake of the free spirit in each of us it must be destroyed.

Pizarro: So there is Christian charity. To save my soul I must kill another man!

De Nizza: To save love in the world you must kill lovelessness.

Pizarro: Hail to you, sole judge of love! No salvation outside your church; and no love neither. Oh, you arrogance!...(simply.) I do not know love, Father, but what can I ever know if I feel none for him(72)?

Pizarro is castigating De Nizza for his arrogance in believing that there is neither salvation nor love outside the Catholic church. He views the clergy as narrow-minded men of hypocrisy, greed and brutality. And as a result of the love established between himself and Atahualpa, he finally also rejects his duty to the state by declaring, "Francisco Pizarro casts off Carlos the Fifth"(70).

Though Pizarro is able to argue against the state and the church in their unified demand for Atahualpa's life, in action he is left with no choice, for the dominant values prevalent in society finally have a determining effect upon the acts of the individual. Shaffer has placed his Pizarro in such a context

that, though a commander in the army, he cannot preserve the life of his newly found spiritual love against a combination of social forces. Through Pizarro's efforts to break away from other characters' blind acceptance of the existing social conventions, Shaffer reveals the human tragedy that man:

canalizes the greatness of his spiritual awareness into the second-rate formula of a Church-any church: How he *settles* for a Church or Shrine or Synagogue; how he demands a voice, a law, an oracle, and over and over again puts into the hands of other men the reins of repression and the whip of Sole Interpretation.⁶

When talking to Diego, who makes his appeal to Pizarro's sense of comradeship and loyalty to his men, Pizarro reveals the hollow nature of "gang love":

Look, you were born a Man. Not a Blue man, or a Green man, but A Man. You are able to feel a thousand separate loves unordered by fear or solitude. Are you going to trade them all in for Gang-love? Flag-love? Carlos-the-Fifth-love? Jesus-the-Christ-love? All that has been tied on you; it is only this that makes you bay for death(73).

Here Shaffer is speaking through Pizarro, expressing his dissatisfaction with all organized institutions; for they are all restrictive, leaving the individual with no room for meaningful exploration of spiritual fulfillment. Behind this view is Shaffer's belief that there are many different gods available for worship. As James R. Stacy points out:

Man should not limit himself to a worship defined by a band; he must individualize a worship and seek as many gods as he can. In the same way he should not limit himself to a single, consistent identity, which becomes nothing more than a category of social expectations.

⁶Peter Shaffer, "To See the Soul of a Man...", *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 1965, Sec. II, 3.

Shaffer has come to accept that contradictions and varying images are a truthful reflection of self. For him there are many gods and many selves, and no band can embrace them all.⁷

While Shaffer is conscious of man's need for individualized worship, he is also aware of the restrictive impact of already established social values upon the individual. By the end of the play, Pizarro is forced to give in to the joined forces of the church and the state. He is left with only the hope that Atahualpa, the man who has promised him peace, joy and immortality, will indeed resurrect.

Finally, Shaffer confronts the consequences of the Inca king's failure to resurrect. The whole Incan empire collapses:

The families that sing on the terrace are gone. In their place slaves shuffle underground and they don't sing there. Peru is a silent country, frozen in avarice(80).

Pizarro is left in total disillusionment and despair, filled with a sense of having been cheated. "Cheat! You've cheated me! Cheat..."(79), he cries out. Paradoxically, at the same time he is also filled with a sense of overwhelming emotion, shedding tears, and experiencing an intensity of feeling that his cynicism has always prevented him from feeling before. It is this feeling that makes him accept Atahualpa as his son, and provides him with a certain comfort. In the following speech Pizarro in his desperation conveys Shaffer's belief in man's need to create a personal object of worship, instead of those forced upon them.

⁷Stacy, 328.

The sky sees nothing, but you saw. Is there comfort there? The sky knows no feeling, but we know them, that's sure. Martin's hope, and De Soto's honour, and your trust-your trust which hunted me: we alone make these. That's some marvel, yes, some marvel. To sit in a great cold silence, and sing out sweet with just our own warm breath: that's some marvel, surely. To make water in a sand world: surely, surely...God's just a name on your nail; and naming begins cries and cruelties. But to live without hope of after, and make whatever God there is, oh, that's some immortal business surely(79-80).

Pizarro's spiritual search parallels the Spanish conquest of Peru. While both the common soldiers and the representatives of the state institutions are driven by their hunger for material wealth, i.e., territory and gold, and the church is driven by its passion for religious conversion, Pizarro is driven by his need to conquer time and death. Inevitably, he comes into conflict with his fellow conquistadors in deciding what to do with Atahualpa, the man-god, whom he has found at the end of his quest. From his contact with the Inca king, he experiences the joy of meeting a soul-companion, and believes he has found real meaning in life. However, although his purpose differs from that of the others in the expedition, as its supreme commander he is still part of the Spaniards, an old man defined by his previous life, shaped by the social institutions that he is rejecting too late. Thus the joy he has experienced with Atahualpa results in total despair when Atahualpa, for whose death Pizarro is partly responsible, does not rise with the sun after being killed by the Spanish soldiers. As Pizarro sheds his first tears, he reveals to the audience that "in all your life you never made one of these, I know, and I not till this

minute"(79). He recognizes that it is an "immortal business" for man to "make whatever God there is"(80).

What course is there when people have rejected formerly accepted values and have not found new ones? The question Pizarro raises in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* is a twentieth century question. In this play, Shaffer is saying that life is meaningless without a sense of the divine, man is in urgent need to create for himself whatever god there is, and modern society is an obstacle which stands in the way of the individual's spiritual fulfillment.

CHAPTER III

THE NORMAL UNNORMAL

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Atahualpa, the newly found fountain of Pizarro's life, is executed after being accused of "usurping the throne and killing his brother; of idolatry and of having more than one wife"¹: reasons conceived by the Spaniards for their own purposes and not relevant to the Inca Empire. Nine years later, at the National Theatre on July 26, 1973, in Shaffer's second major play, *Equus*, the same kind of murder recurred. This time it was not physical, but spiritual, again in the name of social normality.

After its performance in both London and New York, *Equus* received rave reviews. Although detailed critical analysis is virtually nonexistent, there are, of course, reviews, and these differed greatly in their estimate of the cause of the play's popular acclaim. Barry B. Witham wrote, "For what is ultimately applauded in *Equus* is not its message but its packaging."² On the other hand, while recognizing the importance of the theatrical excellence of the play, Gene A. Plunka attributed *Equus*' popularity to its ideas, for it "speaks for an era; it is the raison d'être of a period in history in which individuals are trying to find themselves by turning inward and by moving

¹Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 77-8.

²Barry B. Witham, "The Anger in *Equus*," *Modern Drama*, 22 (March 1979), 66.

away from social and political problems."³

Though *Equus* is far removed in time from the previous historical play, in theme it is closely related. Barbara Lounsberry notes, "In fact, the historically removed and more elaborate *Royal Hunt of the Sun* can help the reader penetrate the starker *Equus*,"⁴ for here Shaffer is again concerned with presenting the destructive nature of the established institutions, and man's urgent need for a sense of the divine through which he can transcend the stifling existence of his daily routine.

In *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* the narrator is not the protagonist, but in *Equus* Shaffer probed the agony of his protagonist by having him function as the narrator. He is revealed almost exclusively through his own words, often spoken in extended monologues similar to those of Pizarro. In his direct address both to characters on the stage and the audience in the theatre, the agony of his soul in conflict is transferred to the audience. Furthermore, the interplay between Dysart's extended monologues and the reenactment of scenes both in and out of the doctor's office in ritualistic form, transforms the audience's observation into participation.

Although the play is initially concerned with the rehabilitation of Alan Strang, it centres primarily upon the

³ Gene A. Plunka, "The Existential Ritual: Peter Shaffer's *Equus*," *Kansas Quarterly*, XII(Fall 1980), 95.

⁴Lounsberry, 13.

vacillations of Martin Dysart, who struggles to reconcile his profession with his need for worship. Like Atahualpa for Pizarro, the boy functions primarily as a catalyst. In Dysart's opening speech, he reveals his desperate desire to break the confines of his secular existence and strive towards the sphere of the divine, using the image of a horse that is chained, and has "some desire absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind."⁵ The middle-aged psychiatrist, "all reined up in old language and assumptions"(18), is trapped by the normality of a society bound by tradition, convention and inhibition. In his agonized frustration at his inability to probe into the head of the horse, he doubts his professional competence to deal with the vastness of the human psyche. He is a man left in the dark to struggle desperately for life-sustaining meaning.

As the play moves forward, we are bought backward in time into a world dominated by the normal, which Shaffer has already established as the restrictive force that leaves the middle-aged individual barren, and deprives the young of a sense of being.

In the first scene which reenacts the past, Hesther Salomon, the magistrate, urges Dysart to accept the case of Alan Strang, a seventeen year old boy, who has blinded six horses. The magistrate, who feels totally fit for her job, possesses the level-headed outlook of her occupation and is a firm believer in

⁵Shaffer, *Equus* (Penguin Books, 1977), 17. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of this chapter.

the value of social convention. She approaches Dysart with the belief that he is the one who has done "the most superb work with children" (25). Dismissive of the mysterious aspect of life, she wants the doctor to hold onto conventional priorities: to release the boy of his pain and restore him to the normal. She repeats this several times in her dialogues with Dysart. However, in her mostly one line speeches, she does not develop her idea of the normal, giving the audience the impression that either she does not have a clear idea about what the normal is, or she simply takes it for granted that whatever is accepted by society is, in fact, normal. So, inevitably, the definition and sense of the normal in the play is mainly conveyed through Dysart, a definition and sense derived from his investigation of the causes of Alan's crime and his own hollow existence in the normal world.

The normal world in the play is one of sterility and conformity. To illustrate and heighten our perception of this, Shaffer places Alan in a family with a couple whose attitudes toward the world are so different that the basis of their relationship is enigmatic. The father, Frank Strang, is an atheist while the mother, Dora, is religious. With religion as the "real problem in the house"(34), the parents are divided concerning how to bring Alan up. Alan in terms of his public life is ultimately a product of his family which is a microcosm of the larger social world. Each parent presents his/her set of beliefs and imposes it upon Alan with the best intention. Frank

refuses to allow Alan to watch television because he believes that it "takes away your intelligence and concentration, every minute you watch it"(27). He considers the programs are nothing but "mindless jokes! Every five minutes some laughing idiot selling you something you don't want; just to bolster up the economic system"(27-8). He encourages Alan, instead, to gain further education, regardless of his son's aptitude. On the other hand, despite Frank's contempt for Dora's Christianity, she has taken Alan through its paces when he was very young.

However, although the parents are different in their beliefs, they are both products of the social norm which requires them to exist in a world without passion and worship. And what they are trying to do to Alan is make him conform to the particular version of social normality which they each follow. "By following his father's wishes, the boy would lose myth and become entangled in abstractions and optimism, like a modern day Laocoon."⁶ The nonrational forces of his personality would be checked, and the theoretical man would destroy the instinctual. The father is the enemy of myth. "By following his mother's wishes, Alan would succumb to the naysaying of traditional christianity,"⁷ which Dora accepts as a matter of course. In their conflicting attempts to make Alan conform to the social norms, the parents are each offering their version of a life without the passion and real worship which would make

⁶Doyle W. Walls, "*Equus: Shaffer, Nietzsche, and the Neuroses of Health*," *Modern Drama*, XXII(Sep. 1984), 316.

⁷Walls, 316.

Alan's life meaningful.

The sterility of the world is further illustrated in Shaffer's description of the sex lives of the married couples. Dora presents herself as an upright lady governed by her religious belief. When informing Alan about sex, she tells him that it is a "biological" and "spiritual" matter(35). Though this partly initiates the physical and spiritual passion of Alan's later belief that he is one with Equus, it does not represent the actual sex life between Frank and Dora. If there is any sex between them at all, it can only happen as "a biological matter." Sex as a spiritual matter simply does not exist. In fact, it probably does not exist even as "a biological matter," as we see in the dialogue between Alan and Jill when they were caught watching the pornographic movie by Frank.

Alan: I mean what else has he got?...He's got mum, of course, but well-she-she-she

Jill: She doesn't give him anything?

Alan: That's right. I bet you...She doesn't give him anything. That's right... That's really right!... She likes Ladies and Gentlemen. Do you understand what I mean?

Jill[mischievously]: Ladies and Gentlemen aren't naked.

Alan: That's right! Never!...Never! That would be disgusting! She'd have to put bowler hats on them!...Jodhpurs(96)!

By adhering to the socially respectable norms, Dora denies man's instinctual power, which is in large part the reality of this world. She also denies Frank's access to reality, driving him to find meaning in a base and vulgar shadow, the pornographic movie.

The lack of passion in Alan's parents' sex life is paralleled in Dysart's married life. Dysart and his wife, "a Scottish lady dentist"(61), have not kissed each other for six years, and they did not "go in for children"(61), a situation resulting from his low sperm count, though Dysart blames his wife's puritanism for it. Living side by side, the two exist with no meaningful, no spiritual communication. His wife does not share his love for the Greek culture, over which he spends night after night reading books and looking at photographs.

Shaffer uses Dysart as a spokesman for his idea that in our modern world, because people have already rejected the traditional Christian God and have not found a substitute to satisfy their longing for a sense of the divine, they exist in a spiritual void, without an object for their passionate worship. Dysart is filled with despair and disgust at a mundane daily routine which is termed normal, and therefore an effective spokesman against normality itself. His entire life, both personal and professional, is merely an unhappy product of social normality. With no real hope of fulfillment as a doctor in "the readjustment business"(21), his job is to take the "freaks"(21) and adapt them to normality. Though he conforms to its appearances, he has no faith in its substance. However, while he senses the existence of a deeper reality, he is not able to grasp it.

The state in which modern man lives is typified by Dysart's existence. He is married, and has no children. He takes trips;

he has an interesting job which also places him in a high social station. Although he has what some would call a "good" life, for Dysart it is only a shell. He is unhappy in his marriage; he has no children because of his inability to procreate physically. Disillusioned with modern civilization and unhappy with his role in it, he turns to the Greek civilization for spiritual comfort. However, although he uses words such as "fantastic surrender" and "wild returns" to describe his trips to the mythical land of Greece, we only see that the routinized trips are his futile attempts at recapturing the Greek civilization: "Such wild returns I make to the womb of civilization. Three weeks a year in the Peleponnese [sic], every bed booked in advance, every meal paid for by vouchers, cautious jaunts in hired Fiats, suitcases crammed with Kao-Pectate! Such a fantastic surrender to the primitive"(82).

Like Pizarro to Atahualpa, professionally, Dysart is also a middle-aged middle man, standing between society and Alan. In fact, as a doctor, he is the very priest of normality, professionally committed to the healing of the sick, and in the name of healing he both heals and destroys. Healing as social necessity gives Dysart his social function. He is dealing with Alan on behalf of the society and his job is to bring Alan back to the normal condition. However, while uncovering Alan's unconsciousness and mysteries, the doctor sees their significance and realizes the harm he has done to the boy.

The mental state of Dysart in this respect is clearly revealed in one of his monologues addressed to the audience, a description of a nightmare he had as a result of the extremity of Alan's case. In the nightmare, Dysart identified his profession with that of a chief priest whose job is to dissect children in a ritual sacrifice, "on which depends the fate of the crops or of a military expedition"(24). In this case "the fate of the crops or of a military expedition" is clearly his dream symbol of the norm preached by Hesther, a norm which sacrifices the individual to preserve itself. Dysart's dream is telling him clearly that by bringing his patients back to normal, he is taking away their very lives.

The dream is directly linked to the reality, in that not only does he appear as chief priest-surgeon with "unique talent for carving that has got me [Dysart] where I am"(24); he is also accompanied by two assistant priests, who are in real life Bennett and Throughgood. As Hesther comments, these two, when confronted with Alan's case, will "be cool and exact. And underneath they'll be revolted, and immovably English"(19).

Though in his dream, Dysart doubts that his "repetitive and smelly work is doing any social good at all"(25), out of his fear of the two assistants with their lumpy, pop-eyed masks, he adheres to the principles of the normal and wears a very professional outlook, knowing otherwise he would be another victim. So Dysart "settled for being pallid and provincial, out of my eternal timidity"(82). At the same time he doubted if it

was or is right for him to do what he is and has been doing, because he is sure that "a horse's head is finally unknowable to me"(18).

The central concern of Dysart in his analysis of his personal and professional life is its lack of passionate worship, which he regards as the core of human existence. He has no belief in the Christian God:

Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus-no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like, and slate roofs-just as of certain frowns in people and slouches'...I'd say to them-'Worship as many as you can see- and more will appear(62)!

His major criticism of his wife is that she is "utterly worshipless"(62), and "she's turned into a shrink. The familiar domestic monster. Margaret Dysart: the shrink's shrink" (61). Later in the play, he realizes that the same accusation can also be applied to himself:

What worship has he ever known? Real worship! Without worship you shrink, it's as brutal as that...I shrank my own life. No one can do it for you(82).

Dysart realizes that he is checked and castrated by the education he has received, limited by "old language and old assumptions"(18). Society has deprived him of his ability to develop the passionate worship he longs for. Though he feels his life is intolerable, he lacks the energy and passion, in other words, the horse power, to break away from a social convention, whose overwhelming power is seen both in the dominating figures

of the two assistant dream priests and in his own power over Alan, his patient.

Once we understand the kind of character Dysart is, it becomes easy for us to understand and accept his interpretation of Alan's case. His treatment of the boy of course demands that he interpret those elements in the latter's life and psyche that are related to his blinding of the horses, but his interpretation is, in fact, an analysis of those elements of his own distress about his own life, finally an analysis of himself, through which he realizes more and more intensely that he is only a slave to his profession, i.e., to the definition of himself that society has imposed upon him.

To Dysart, Alan's madness is the only alternative to his own. He comes to believe that Alan typifies the primitive, spontaneous life. While Dysart is confined by normality, the substance of which is irrelevant to his pursuit of meaning, initially Alan is able to break away from such confinement and create his own object of passionate worship. In Alan and Dysart we have two entirely different ways of existence. On the one hand, there is Dysart, characterized by passivity, unable to claim full control of his own life. On the other hand, there is Alan, an individual, characterized by violent activity. The difference lies in Dysart's being rational, and Alan's being instinctual. And as the play develops forward, we see the superiority of Alan's violent activity over Dysart's passivity.

In the process of his personal development, Alan expresses his dissatisfaction with his parents, and is willing to escape from their control. This is introduced in the story of Trojan to whom one need only say, "Bear me away"(40), and like the hero in a fairy tale, one will be transported to a magical world. For Alan, only the cowboy truly appreciates the horse and its associations. Alan is struck by the fact that when the rider of Trojan is confronted by Alan's father, who wishes to know his name, he tells Frank his name is "Jesse James"(41). In Alan's mind only cowboys understand.

No one understands!...Except cowboys. They do. I wish I was a cowboy. They're free. They just swing up and it's miles of grass...I bet all cowboys are *orphans*!...I bet they are!...No one says to cowboys 'Receive my meaning'! they wouldn't dare. Or 'God' all the time. 'God sees you Alan. God's got eyes everywhere-'(49-9).

As orphans, cowboys are as disrespectful of the normal social world as the rider of Trojan is of Alan's parents. As orphans, cowboys are also able to escape from the suffocating influence of the family.

The reenactment of Alan's night ride is not only Dysart's means of curing the boy, but most importantly Shaffer's way of presenting a worship that is passionate and original, individualized to suit Alan's spiritual need. The union between Alan and the horse is spiritual, and the passion is illustrated through the sexual implications in Alan's riding. Alone with Equus in the field of Ha Ha, a mythical world that is "huge" and "full of mist"(70), Alan takes his clothes off, and becomes as naked as the horse itself. "The horse isn't dressed," he tells

Dysart. "It's the most naked thing you ever saw"(49). The sexual relationship is further implied when Alan puts on the "manbit""so's it won't happen too quick"(71). Then Alan starts to touch "all over" Equus. The relationship is finally consummated when we see Alan riding Equus and hear him shouting

I'm stiff! Stiff in the wind! My flanks! My hooves! Mane on my legs, on my flanks, like whips! Raw! Raw! I'm raw! Raw! Feel me on you! On you! On you! On you! I want to be in you! I want to be you forever and ever!- Equus, I love you! Now!- Bear me away! Make us one person! One person! One person! One person! One person(74)!

While in his description of the married couples' sex lives, Shaffer shows the sterility of the normal world, here, in his depiction of Alan's individualized worship of Equus, he uses sex to illustrate a passion which is powerful enough to give Alan's life meaning. James R. Stacey points out:

Shaffer's intention... is to use sex as a passion with which his audience can readily identify, and to see an even more transcendent, more intense, and more meaningful passion in religion-the anthropological origins of which are inextricably linked with sex.⁸

At the end of Act I, in the reenactment of Alan's ride Shaffer makes Alan an individual who is in union with his own god, and who is in a position to control his own life. As the two become one, Alan becomes a god himself, with the horse power to turn whichever way he wants. Through his identification with Equus, Alan is able to escape from what others expect of him, and live, with passion and power, a life that is his own.

⁸Stacy, 333.

The sense of passion and power is shown not only in Alan's } sexual images but also in the power of the horses themselves, symbolic, as they are, of the instinctual forces of man's unconscious. The horses are archetypal images, and Shaffer demands that they be treated as such:

Any literalism which could suggest the cosy familiarity of a domestic animal-or worse, a pantomime horse-should be avoided. The actors should never crouch on all fours, or even bend forward. They must always-except on the one occasion where Nugget is ridden-stand upright, as if the body of the horse extended invisibly behind them. Animal effect must be created entirely mimetically, through the use of legs, knees, neck, face, and the turn of the head which can move the mask above it through all the gestures of equine wariness and pride. Great care must also be taken that the masks are put on before the audience with very precise timing-the actors watching each other, so that the masking has an exact and ceremonial effect.⁹

Here Shaffer is obviously not interested at all in presenting the real horse, but in presenting what it represents, the repressed dark forces within us. With the energy provided through the horse symbols, Alan is able to free himself from the oppression of the normal and realize his own identity. His ride on horse back is a release of the oppressed, yet powerful instinctual forces from the enemies of both himself and Equus, who are:

The Hosts of Hoover. The Hosts of Philco. The Hosts of Pifco. The House of Remington and all its tribe!

} corporatist
commercial

and

The Hosts of Jodhpur. The Hosts of Bowler and Gymkhana. All those who show him off for their vanity. Tie rosettes on his head for vanity(73)!

} social
class
distinctions

S 27

⁹Shaffer, *The Collected Plays* (New York: Harmony, 1980), 400.

These enemies catalogued by Alan in his night ride are previously hinted at in his two previous reenactments. In Alan's first reenactment of his childhood experience on the beach, we see him a six year old boy thoroughly enjoying himself on horse back.

The fellow held me tight, and let me turn the horse which way I wanted. All that power going any way you wanted(48).

Then his parents intrude and cause him humiliation and rage. He finds them demeaning and absurd. Their values are not his own. From his first ride, he associates the horse with freedom, sensuality, and anti-sociality. Sociality in this case is represented by Frank who speaks pompously with words like,

I intend to report you to the police for endangering the lives of children.
You're a public menace, d'you know that? How dare you pick up children and put them on dangerous animals.
In my considered opinion you are both dangers to the safety of this beach(41).

In the second reenactment scene, Alan is a clerk at an electrical shop. He says of the job, " I loved it," for "you get to spend every minute with electrical things. It's fun"(53). But as the customers bombard him, we see him becoming more and more distressed, forced to repeat the word "sorry"(54) three times. He is filled with a sense of being inferior. No wonder in his ride he takes as his enemies the brand names he has become acquainted with there.

At the end of Act I, Equus has become the incarnation of Alan's unconscious. And obviously Alan has become possessed by a

spirit which is his own creation. As Dora informs Dysart:

Whatever's happened has happened *because of Alan*. Alan is himself. Every soul is itself. If you added up everything we ever did to him, from his first day on earth to this, you wouldn't find why he did this terrible thing-because that's *him*; not just all of our things added up(78).

When Hesther identifies what has happened to Alan as pain, Dysart quickly responds that it is "his pain. His own. He made it"(82). And because of this, Dysart envies him.

[*Earnestly*] Look...to go through life and call it yours-*your life* -you first have to get your own pain. Pain that's unique to you. You can't just dip into the common bin and say 'That's enough!'...He's done that. All right, he's sick. He's full of misery and fear. He was dangerous, and could be again, though I doubt it. But that boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: I envy it(82).

While Dysart discovers Alan's passionate worship in his private world, he also sees how barren and empty Alan's public life is,

What else has he got? Think about him. He can hardly read. He knows no physics or engineering to make the world real for him. No paintings to show him how others have enjoyed it. No music except television jingles. No history except tales from a desperate mother. No friends. Not one kid to give him a joke, or make him know himself more moderately. He is a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist(81).

In other words, as a product of normality, Alan is an isolated individual typical of modern man, for whom existence in the world of modern technology has no substance.

Dysart's view of Alan's public life is directly linked to his own unsatisfied private life and his doubts about his own profession. Alan's public life and dysart's total life, public

and private, are in nature the same, with Alan being oppressed by normality and Dysart officiating as its priest. Yet in Alan's private worship, Dysart finds the only alternative for his own empty existence, just as Pizarro sees Atahualpa as his new found fountain of life. Dysart believes Alan's worship is real, in sharp contrast with his own, which is only linguistic:

And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the word, that freaky boy tries to conjure the reality! I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos-and out my window he is trying to become one, in a Hampshire field!...I watch that woman knitting, night after night-a woman I haven't kissed for six years-and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek(82-3)!

From an understanding of Alan's early life Dysart discovers the significance of Alan's private worship and recognizes that it is the core of the boy's existence. He also recognizes that when he functions as a doctor on behalf of social normality, he is taking away this core. His cure of Alan is identified with what happens in his dream:

...with a surgical skill, which amazes even me, I fit in the knife and slice elegantly down to the navel, just like a seamstress following a pattern. I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out and throw them hot and steaming onto the floor(24).

On the other hand, if Dysart can create and affirm anything for Alan after having cured him, then what he has done to Alan may be worthwhile. However Shaffer makes it clear that Dysart can only negate and deny a part of Alan's self and has nothing to offer as a replacement. His physical inability to procreate symbolizes his inability to create spiritually. He himself lives

in a spiritual void. And he deems the inappropriateness of his position ridiculous. After contrasting the superiority of Alan's private life with the inferiority of his own, he concludes:

Then in the morning, I put away my book on the cultural shelf, close up the Kodachrome snaps of Mount Olympus, touch my reproduction statue of Dionysus for luck-and go off to hospital to treat him for insanity (83).

In his analysis of Alan's case and his own life, he realizes the false nature of the profession which holds him in servitude. He believes that by taking away Alan's worship he has committed a serious crime, for "when Equus leaves-if he leaves at all-it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don't stock replacements...If you know anything, you'd get up this minute and run from me fast as you could"(107). For Dysart, Alan's return to the normal is meaningless.

He'll feel himself acceptable! *What then?* Do you think feelings like this can be simply re-attached, like plasters? Struck onto other objects we select? *Look at him!*...My desire might be to make this boy an ardent husband-a caring citizen- a worshipper of abstract and unifying God. My achievement, however, is more likely to make a living ghost(107)!

The "living ghost" is the modern man placed in the normal world which is the era of modern technology. Such a world may offer material comfort, but no spiritual fulfillment. Because of this, Dysart can only view himself as destroyer, not a saviour of Alan.

Dysart's realization of his own situation leaves himself in agony. As a middle-aged man, his social position, his past experience and his education have made him a man bound by the

social institutions. Despite his thoughts, he can act only according to established social normality. So in the end he promises to Hesther:

I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. When that's done, I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him pattering off into the Normal world where animals are treated *properly*; made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them-blinking our nights away in a non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shrivelling heads! I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal place of ecstasy-multi-lane highways driven through the guts of cities, extinguishing Place altogether, *even the idea of place*! He'll trot on his metal pony tamely through the concrete evening-and one thing I promise you: he will never touch hide again! With any luck his private parts will come to feel as plastic to him as the products of the factory to which he will almost certainly be sent(107-8).

Clearly this is not what Dysart wants to do to Alan, but whatever he wants to do can never be done. He is held in servitude by the Normal and has no control over his own life because "the sterile life that he leads naturally becomes a part of him after so many years."¹⁰ In his own identification with the horse, Dysart has clearly presented himself as chained and weak. "My own basic force-my horse power, if you like-is too little"(18). However, in his treatment of Alan, Dysart is momentarily inspired and has at least a strong desire to break away from his normal position. This is illustrated not only in his analysis of Alan, but also in his self-analysis. The power of Shaffer's message is superbly realized through both the self-awareness gained by Dysart and the ritualistic performance

¹⁰Plunka, 93.

of Alan.

At the end of the play, we see Alan's reenactment of the blinding of the six horses. If the blinding is viewed as an isolated phenomenon, clearly Alan should either be sent to prison, as many of the magistrates argue, or excused, as Hesther argues, on the ground that he is unbalanced and in pain. Hesther's view prevails and Alan is saved from prison, but Dysart sees beyond the isolated phenomenon, and understands Alan's problem as the absence of passion and worship in the modern world. Specifically, as Walls notes, Alan blinded the horses "because he is finally torn between two myths: the classical, the pagan one he created; and the christian one he inherited from his mother, which saddled him with guilt and shame concerning his sexuality and its relation to an ultimate concept like God."¹¹ And he is further torn by the conflict "between the outlet his sensuality has found in horses and his burgeoning physical interest in Jill Mason,"¹² that is between the sexuality of his totally private myth and his desire for a more normal sexual relationship.

The blinding of the eyes is also significant in terms of Alan's efforts to extend the sphere of his private life, bring it relatively out into the open so that he can make some adjustment between it and his public life. The eyes are obviously a means by which society checks upon its members. In

¹¹Walls, 320.

¹²Walls, 320.

Dysart's dream, when his mask slips, the eyes of the two assistant priests are extremely terrifying. "They see the green sweat running down my face-their gold pop-eyes suddenly fill up with blood-they tear the knife out of my hand"(25). The eyes are also associated with parental control. It is the eye of the father, Frank, which watches Alan's passionate self-flagellation when "the door of his bedroom was ajar"(50), and makes the boy feel guilty. Finally the eyes that Alan strikes at are also those of the God he inherited from his mother. "God sees you, Alan. God's got eyes everywhere-" (49). These eyes to Alan are, as the stage direction indicates, "judging, punishing and pitiless"(106). By blinding the eyes of the horses, Alan is striking at all the eyes that have oppressed him. }

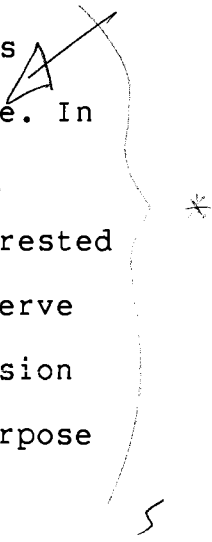
According to the norms of society, Dysart's treatment of Alan is absolutely proper, and it is true that Alan at the end has become unstressed. But that absence of stress is presented as a spiritual death, with Alan lying flat under a blanket while Dysart addresses a farewell speech to him. Throughout the play, we are made aware that Dysart questions not only his ability to cure the boy, but his right to cure him, to take away his pain. The more efficient the cure, the more he doubts his right. At the end of the play, the focus has moved entirely away from Alan to Dysart, who is now imprisoned by his vision of the god, Equus. Like Alan, Dysart now stands, "in the dark with a pick in my hand strikng at heads!...There is now in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out"(108). We recognize that the chain

in his mouth is the dictates of normality. He is left with no choice but to do whatever he is supposed to do as a psychiatrist:

My desire might be to make this boy an ardent husband a caring citizen-a worshipper of abstract and unifying God. My achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost(107)!

Finally, he stripped Alan of what he himself so desires in the boy.

Though at the end Shaffer makes Dysart rob Alan of his pain, passion and worship, though he makes him destroy Alan's spiritual life, the awakening of Dysart's own pain and his self-realization have sent a clear message to the audience. In the world of normality, in the modern age of science and technology dominated by the rational man, society is interested only in making its deviants conform to its norms. To preserve itself, it cuts the soul out of the body, eliminating passion and worship, and leaving a mechanized being whose only purpose is societal usefulness.



CHAPTER IV

ON *AMADEUS*

With the production of *Amadeus* at London's Olivier Theatre in 1979, six years after the first production of *Equus*, and fifteen years after the first production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Shaffer continued his dramatization of man's search for a spiritual meaning in the midst of the destruction wrought by the forces of society. Though all three plays are set in widely different times, they are "mutually revealing," for "each play is really an exploration of man's search for gods, what he does when he seems to find them, and how they ultimately elude him."¹

Both in Britain and the United States the success of *Amadeus* has been tremendous, even greater than that of the first two plays. It has been produced in many other countries as well, and has achieved almost universal popularity. However, the critical response which it has received has been similar to that received by *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*. Some critics have used words like "appalling," "nauseating," "dreadful," "banal" and "hollow."² Others have employed very different terms like "fascinating," "brilliant," "dazzling," "witty," "operatic" and "original."³ Controversial as it is, the play received five

¹Lounsberry, 13.

²Roland Gellatt, "Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*: a Controversial Hit," *Saturday Review*, Nov. 1980, 11.

³C.J. Gianakaris, "A playwright Looks at Mozart: Peter Shaffer's

Tonys in New York, including a Tony for best drama of the 1980 season.

Critics have also disagreed about the relationship between *Amadeus* and the other two major plays. Michael Hinden believes that *Amadeus* marks a transition for Shaffer. Though on the surface, he admitted, *Amadeus* shares some similarities with the two previous plays, in theme it differs from them, for "the protagonist now abandons his quest for union with divinity and becomes the antagonist of God, setting himself against the deity in personal confrontation and defiance."⁴ Daniel R. Jones counters that in *Amadeus* "Shaffer does not abandon his "God-Hunting"; instead, he continues to explore his major subject in ways that closely mirror the earlier plays." The parallels he found in his analysis show that "Shaffer continues his quest for God in new and increasingly sophisticated ways."⁵

Although the play takes its title from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Mozart is not the protagonist, but a projection of a man through whom God delivers his most profound music. The protagonist is Salieri, who, like Dysart, functions as narrator, interpreter and participant. Salieri's narration and interpretation are addressed directly to the audience, whom he

³(cont'd) *Amadeus*, " *Comparative Drama*, XV(Spring 1981), 52.

⁴Michael Hinden, "When Playwrights Talk to God: Peter Shaffer and the Legacy of O'Neill," *Comparative Drama*, XVI(Spring 1982), 57.

⁵Jones, 146.

calls "Ghosts of the Future."⁶ By having Salieri narrate the story and conjure up his audience as "Ghosts of the Future," Shaffer establishes a communication that crosses not only space in the theatre but also time itself. Thus, like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, the historically removed events are dramatised not merely as something which happened in the past, but as something which is closely related to our time, for the meaning of the play depends on how "Ghosts of the Future," i.e., the modern audience, receive and interpret it.

To a large extent, the interpretation of the play depends on how the audience views Salieri, whose reliability is sometimes questionable because of his close involvement and his subjectivity. Literally the text is Salieri's deathbed confession to the audience, "entitled *The Death of Mozart; or Did I Do It?*"(8) Salieri explains that though he did not use

⁶Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 5. All the subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of this chapter. Aside from this text, there exist three other different texts of *Amadeus*. They include the text used for the first London production in 1979, published by André Deutsch, 1980, the 'film edition' published by Harper and Row, 1984, and the unpublished film script. The text used here is the second as played in New York and London in 1981. It is substantially different from the previous text in that Salieri is more active in the destruction of Mozart. With regard to the main point for this revision, Shaffer explains, "One of the faults which I believe existed in the London version was simply that Salieri had too little to do with Mozart's ruin.... In this new American version, he stands where he belongs- at the wicked centre of the action."(Shaffer, "Preface" to *The Collected Plays*(New York: Harmony, 1982), xvii.) For a detailed study of the differences between the two texts, see also C.J. Gianakaris, "Shaffer's Revisions in *Amadeus*," *Theatre Journal*, XXV(1983), 88-101. However I have also used several quotations from the first text, those that are informative with regard to the mental state of Salieri, but omitted in the revised text.

arsenic to poison Mozart, he definitely poisoned him in other ways, and we are convinced that he had very much to do with his death. We are also aware that Salieri has failed to convince the people of his time of the murder. Unable to succeed with those of his own time, he appeals to "Ghosts of the Future," attempting to convince them that he is responsible for the death of Mozart. In his three hour confession and its intense appeal to "Ghosts of the Future," we see in Salieri a desperation that reminds us of Pizarro and Dysart. In Act II, i, this desperation is made obvious. "I sense that this is either meaningless to you, or evil. However it is my confession in what is now the last hour of my life, so I pray you to bear it."⁷

Analysis reveals that Salieri's motive for such a confession is essentially the same motive which drives Pizarro and Dysart: the need to question the order in which he exists and the need to find meaning for that existence. But Salieri, compared with Pizarro and Dysart, is stronger and more resourceful. He is dynamic where they are relatively static. He takes action. When he fails to link his name to the divine instrument, Mozart, in his own time, he appeals to "posterity"⁽⁷⁾, carrying Pizarro and Dysart's quest further than they were able to carry it.

The play traces his progress from an ambitious child to a man of great fame and finally to a man thrown into oblivion. The central impulse in his life is to gain fame through music, and his relationship to music depends upon his relationship with

⁷Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus* (London: Deutsch, 1980), 69.

God. In his first monologue, Salieri conjures up "Ghosts of the Future" to inform them of his childhood ambition for fame as a composer of music, which "alone has ever told me that there is any value in life,"⁸ for "a note of music is either right or wrong, *absolutely*"(7). The fame he is after is one that would make him "blaze like a comet across the firmament of Europe"(7). With fame as his goal and a strong belief in his talent, at the age of sixteen, Salieri makes a pact with his "old candle-smoked God...with dealer's eyes"(23):

'*Signore*, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honour you with much music all the days of my life!' As I said *Amen*, I saw His eyes flare. [*As "God"*] '*Bene*. Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you'll be blessed!'... '*Grazie!*' I called back. 'I am Your servant for life!'(8)

This pact has determined Salieri's life. Although it appears that what he required of his God is different from that which his parents required, i.e., to "protect commerce, and keep them forever in mediocrity"(7), what he finally received from Him, he realizes, is not that much different. Because of the pact, he enjoys worldly fame, but suffers despair when he loses faith in his own achievement. As his desire for fame becomes his sole obsession, whatever is irrelevant to that desire is ignored. He represses his emotional and sexual desires by marrying a "respectable wife"(9) who is "conspicuous" in her "lack of fire"(10). Even in front of his pupil, Katherina Cavalieri, whom he describes as "a bubbling student with merry eyes and a sweet

⁸Peter Shaffer, 23.

eatable mouth"(10), he remains a virtuous man, faithful to his wife and faithful to his promise to his God. Whatever helps him gain fame, he pursues. He becomes "A tireless teacher. A tireless founder of Committees to improve the lot of poor musicians."⁹ To achieve his purpose, he is willing to sacrifice and do anything. In order to gain the post of First Royal Chapelmaster he even desires the death of the seventy year old Giuseppe Bonno.

Prior to his meeting Mozart, the pact, Salieri believes, is well kept by both parties. He has remained faithful to his vow and has become successful both in his musical composition and in his movement up the social scale. As "the most successful young musician in the city of musicians"(11), he is well on his way to being the emperor of the "Palace of Sound."¹⁰

Successful as he is, Salieri is vulnerable because his life is empty and passionless, and his pursuit of fame through music has deprived him of his human qualities. Once his belief in his musical talent is shaken, there will be nothing left for him; for music is not only the one thing that he clings to in life, it is also the determiner of his faith in his God. He truly believes that by being virtuous and hard working, he earns the right to be famous.

⁹Shaffer, 27.

¹⁰Shaffer, 27.

However, fame his God can promise and give, but not genius.
Thus when he is confronted with Mozart, the man and his music, Salieri's faith is shaken. Upon hearing Mozart's music for the first time, he recognizes its beauty, and for the first time feels real pain, for according to his faith, Mozart is not the man who deserves to have such talent.

Oh the pain! Pain as I have never known it. I called up to my sharp old God, "*What is this?...What?!*" But the squeezebox went on and on, and the pain cut deeper into my shaking head until suddenly I was running- (18)

He is running like Young Martin, who, because he could no longer worship Pizarro after he broke his word with Atahualpa, "went out into the night- the cold high night of the Andes, hung with stars like crystal apples- and dropped [his] first tears as a man."¹¹ Salieri, struck by the betrayal of Mozart's music, also runs "into the cold night"(18), stunned by the fact that:

It seemed to me I had heard a voice of God- and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard- and it was the voice of an obscene child(19).

Though seriously shaken by Mozart's music, and the paradox of the music and the man, Salieri tries to recover himself and build his faith by further adhering to his pact. He decides to have "more pupils," "more Committees to help musicians," and "more Motets and Anthems to God's glory"(19). Once again he prays to God:

Let your voice enter me!...Let me conduct you! Let me(19)!
After having gathered and analyzed Mozart's other published

¹¹Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 63.

works, he concludes that they display only conventional talent, and the Serenade was a stroke of luck, "the sort of accident which might visit any composer on a lucky day!"(20) As a result, Salieri temporarily regains his confidence and is restored in his hope that God favours him, that he will be indeed God's instrument.

Although the Serenade Salieri hears presents Mozart as a threat to his faith, what happens later in Act I develops more on a personal level. Mozart as an individual ignorant of social convention offends Salieri on several occasions. As an official court composer, Salieri composes a piece of music specially for Mozart's entrance to the court. While Mozart appreciates Salieri's efforts, he does not like the music. Surprising Salieri by remembering the march after having heard it only once, and arrogantly and spontaneously improving it, he unknowingly injures Salieri's sense of self-importance. On another occasion, he seduces Salieri's prize pupil by satisfying her musical fancies and making her a star in an opera. Salieri believes that he is being mocked for his self restraint and decides to revenge himself by means of seducing Mozart's new wife, Constanze.

If we merely focus on the development of this part of the play, Salieri's destruction of Mozart may appear to be only the result of human rivalry. In fact the Chinese production of *Amadeus* by Beijing People's Art Theatre was based on this rivalry. The introduction to the production says:

正当奥地利宫廷乐师萨烈瑞年少有为，倍受约瑟夫皇帝恩宠之际，25岁的莫扎特来到了维也纳。关于这位被誉为“音乐神童”的种种传说，使萨烈瑞不安。当他在男爵夫人的家中，听到莫扎特的一首小夜曲之后，更加感到了一种从未有过的痛苦和恐怖。几天后，皇帝召见莫扎特时，萨烈瑞为欢迎莫扎特演奏了他创作的迎宾曲，谁料莫扎特竟凭记忆准确无误地背乐曲复奏了一遍，并加以即兴发展。天真的莫扎特哪会想到，这正刺伤了萨烈瑞的自尊，从而引起了他的忌恨，他决意要用种种手段来扼杀莫扎特的艺术前程。

(When the Austrian court composer, Salieri, was overwhelmed by his success and favoured by Emperor Joseph, the twenty-five year old Mozart arrived in Vienna. Tales about the "music prodigy" made Salieri restless. When he heard Mozart's Serenade in the library of the Baroness, he experienced unprecedented pain and fear. Furthermore, a few days later, when the Emperor invited Mozart over, Salieri played a piece of march music composed by himself, Mozart surprised him by playing the same piece with precision from his memory after having heard it only once, and transformed it right after that. The innocent Mozart could have never guessed that what he had done hurt Salieri's sense of self-respect and filled him with jealousy and hatred, because of which Salieri is determined to use whatever means available to block Mozart's music advancement.)

Such an interpretation has its merits, considering the particular cultural context in which it is performed; for the concept of God is unfamiliar to the vast majority of the population, and probably to all the theatre goers. However, such a performance is not supported by the later development of the play and does not reflect Shaffer's real intention.

While seducing Constanze, Salieri is finally convinced of who Mozart really is. Constanze begs Salieri to recommend Mozart for the appointment as music tutor to the Princess. Salieri takes his chance by inviting Constanze to his home to discuss the matter while his wife is visiting her relatives in Italy. Constanze, though knowing it improper for her to visit a gentleman on her own, goes with the manuscripts of Mozart's

recent works, for how well they do financially depends, to a large extent, on this appointment. Initially, Salieri has no interest in the manuscripts. His only aim is to get his revenge. However, he fails. Yet he is very determined, and decides to make further efforts.

That same night, when Salieri's curiosity turns to the manuscripts which Constanze only reluctantly left in his possession, the conflict develops from the personal level between Salieri and Mozart to a level between Salieri and his God, with Mozart as the battle ground. The manuscripts are unedited drafts, but they confirm for Salieri that the "Serenade had been no accident"(45). He is captured by their "Absolute Beauty"(45) and comes to realize the emptiness of his own life. "Capisco. I know my fate. Smashed. Smashed down-the Palace of Sound! Now for the first time I feel my emptiness, as Adam felt his nakedness."¹² He is driven to question the God to whom he has prayed and for whom he has lived and worked.

Grazier Signore! You gave me the desire to serve You- which most men do not have- then saw to it that the service was shameful in the ear of the server. *Grazier!* You gave me the desire to praise You- which most men do not have- then made me mute. *Grazier tanti!* You put into me perception of the Incomparable- which most men never know!- then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre. [*His voice gains power*] *Why?...What is my fault?...* Until this day I have pursued virtue with rigour. I have laboured long hours to relieve my fellow men. I have worked and worked the talent You allowed me. [*Calling up*] *You know how hard I've worked!* Solely that in the end, in the practice of the art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it- and it says only one name: MOZART!...Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantile

¹²Shaffer, *Amadeus* (London: Deutsch, 1980), 67.

Mozart!- who has never worked one minute to help another man! Shit-talking Mozart, with his botty-smacking wife! *Him* you have chosen to be your Sole conduct! And *my* only reward- my sublime privilege- is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation!(46-7)

Because Salieri has communed with divinity through Mozart's music, he loses faith in his God. He finds it morally outrageous that God, ignoring the devoted praise of his, Salieri's, music, chooses to bestow his aesthetic blessings on Mozart, a man who is in every way unworthy of such a blessing. He believes that his God has defied both religion and morality by bestowing upon Mozart the ability to create "Absolute Beauty," and he also believes that God is mocking him for his belief that virtue and hard work could make him the candidate for creating that "Absolute Beauty." As a result he rejects his God and decides to wage an open war against Him:

From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from You- *Do you hear?*...They say God is not mocked. I tell you, *Man* is not mocked!...*I* am not mocked!...They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell You NO! It must list to virtue or not blow at all! [*Yelling*] *Dio ingiusto!*- You are the enemy! I name Thee now-*Nemico Eterno!* And this I swear: To my last breath I shall *block* you on earth, as far as I am able! [*He glares up at God. To audience*] What use, after all, is Man, if not to teach God His lessons?(47)

The "Absolute Beauty" which Salieri has been seeking from his youth and which he finds in Mozart's music, is the image in sound of the divine which Shaffer visualized as the sun in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and the horse in *Equus*. When Salieri finds it in Mozart's music, it makes him realize the emptiness of his existence, dominated as it is by the pure egotism of his pursuit

of worldly fame. He senses that without being able to create "Absolute Beauty" he will soon be cast into oblivion and his life will have no meaning, whatever secular success he is able to achieve. He learns that without the creation of "Absolute Beauty," death will finally overwhelms the lesser creation of his fame, and such knowledge makes him a desperate man.

As a result of the loss of his faith in his former view of the nature of God, Salieri reaches a new understanding of himself and decides to alter his life radically. He will try by every means to become the creator of "Absolute Beauty," and if he cannot, he will exert his power over such a creator, namely Mozart, and God himself. Shaffer has Salieri clearly explain to his audience this new relationship with God: "On that dreadful night of the manuscripts my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of His purest manifestations. I had the power. God needed Mozart to let Himself into the world. And Mozart needed me to give him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end-and Mozart was the battleground"(49).

Such a battle is dramatized in the whole of Act II, and is first drawn in Salieri's treatment of the two women, Constanze and Katherina. While his rejection of Constanze shows the ending of the personal conflict with Mozart, his seduction of Katherina is the absolute breaking of the vow of sexual virtue he formerly made to God. On the same day he withdraws "from all my committees to help the lot of poor musicians"(52) and declares,

"So much for my vow of social virtue"(52).

Having altered his relationship with his God, Salieri then starts "the blocking of God in His purest manifestations." In several ingenious ways, he plots to destroy his "disliked human rival"(50) socially, financially and physically. He persuades the Emperor not to appoint him the music tutor of the princess, a position vital to an already financially suffering Mozart. He also sees that Mozart's music does not get to an audience. Successful in this, he furthers Mozart's fiscal ruin by alienating him socially, believing that the most effective way to block God's voice is "Starvation. Reduce the man to destitution. Starve out the God!"(70) The most devastating damage done to Mozart in this respect is Salieri's idea of putting the masons into *The Magic Flute*, as a result of which, Van Swieten, Mozart's last patron, and his last source of income, becomes upset and denounces him as a betrayer. "Now you are a betrayer.... I shall never forgive you. And depend upon it- I shall ensure that no freemason or person of distinction will do so in Vienna so long as I have life!"(84)

Mozart's ruin finally results in his having nightmares, haunted by, according to Salieri, "A figure in gray, masked and sorrowing, come to take him away"(86). Into such a figure Salieri transforms himself, to complete his destruction of Mozart. While Mozart laments in his final despair, "I've written nothing finally good"(87), and cries for his father, Salieri gloats: "Reduce the man: reduce the God. Behold my vow

fulfilled. The profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune"(89).

Surprisingly, Salieri's destruction of God's voice is not rewarded with God's fury, as he expected, but rather with success. As Mozart's "unsurpassed"(53) music "was played once-then totally forgotten"(54), Salieri's power and prestige as a composer overwhelm the whole of Europe. Such a success makes him feel "as if I were being pushed deliberately from triumph to triumph!...I filled my head with golden opinions-yes, and this house with golden furniture"(54). "My taste was for plain things- but I denied it! The successful lived with gold, and so would I"(55). The moment when it is most clearly revealed to Salieri that God is on his side comes when he has just ruined Mozart's court career and expects God's punishment. Instead "God rewarded me by granting me my dearest wish!"(72), the appointment as the First Royal and Imperial Kapellmeister.

Successful as Salieri is in both obtaining worldly fame and ruining Mozart, he is a desperate man, just like Pizarro and Dysart. He is desperate because he is worshipless, "I was born a pair of ears and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship...All around me men seek liberty for mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned- ordered- exhausted by an *Absolute*. Music. This was denied me, and with it all meaning"(95). Right from first meeting Mozart, he realizes his emptiness, perceives the sterility of his existence, and

struggles to become inspired. In his moment of despair, he reveals his true self to Constanze,

I'm a clumsy man. You think me sophisticated- I'm not at all. Take a true look. I've no cunning. I live on ink and sweetmeats. I never see women at all....When I met you last night, I envied Mozart from the depths of my soul. Out of that envy came stupid thoughts. For one silly second I dared imagine that, out of the vast store you obviously possess, you might spare me one coin of tenderness your rich husband does not need- and inspire me also(43).

In the same way he appeals to God for inspiration even when he is warring with Him.

Could I not have stopped my war? Shown him some pity?...Oh, yes, my friends, at any time- if He above had shown me *one drop of it!* Every day I sat to work I *prayed*- I still prayed, you understand! ...'Make this one good in my ears! Just this one! ONE!'(70)

However, as he confessed when trying to seduce Katherina, "I regret that my invention in love, as in art, has always been limited"(51). As these examples show, Shaffer obviously intended to root Salieri's shallow and conventional music in his sterile and passionless life. Because of this sterility and lack of passion he is worshipless, and shrinks, unable to satisfy his ear with his own music, unable to give his life meaning.

Like Pizarro and Dysart, Salieri is primarily a middle man. He stands between the stage and the audience, the past and the present, not only giving the twentieth century audience an eighteenth century perspective on the conflict between himself and Mozart, but also illuminating the rejection of Mozart by the eighteenth century. Unlike his contemporaries, Salieri has the ears to hear the greatness of Mozart. While Salieri's

contemporaries raise Salieri to distinction and try to discredit Mozart's music, we see Salieri as great admirer of that music, and through his ears we appreciate its beauty. In fact, Salieri's reaction to Mozart's Serenade in I vi, is one of the highest praises he gives to Mozart's music in the play. Later, because he firmly believes that Mozart has seduced Katherina, he publicly agrees with others in the court that *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is "excessive"(28) and has "too many notes"(28). But to the audience he voices his supreme praise and admiration for Mozart's music against those of his time. The manuscripts left by Constanze in his hands he regards as "an Absolute Beauty"(45), for "...they are finished as most music is never finished. Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase and the structure would fall"(45). While *Figaro* is regarded as disgraceful and "vulgar"(66) by the court officials, "too long"(66) by the Emperor, and "too complicated," "too tiresome!" and filled with "all those morbid harmonies"(67) by his contemporaries, Salieri gives his highest praise in his speech directed to the audience,

What shall I say to you who will one day hear this last act for yourselves? You will- because whatever else shall pass away, this must remain(66).

Finally, in interpreting *The Magic Flute*, because of which Van Swieten cuts off his support for Mozart, Salieri shows the depth to which he is stirred by his vision of the purifying and divine power of the music,

He had turned them [the masons] into an Order of Eternal Priests. I heard voices calling out of ancient temples. I saw a vast sun rise on a timeless land, where animals

danced and children floated, and by its rays all the poisons we feed each other drawn up and burnt away! ...And in this sun- behold- I saw his *father!* No more an accusing figure but forgiving!- the highest priest of the Order his hand extended to the world in love! Wolfgang feared Leopold no longer: a final legend had been made!...Oh, the sound- the sound of that new-found peace in him- mocking my undiminishing pain! *There* was the magic flute- there beside me! ...Mozart the flute and God the restless player!(83-4)

But like Pizarro and Dysart, whose many years of sterile life have made them who they are, men passionless and worshipless, unable to find change while endlessly longing for it, Salieri's way of life is shaped entirely by his youthful belief, even in his battle with his God. "I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all my life. His poison. We are both poisoned, Amadeus. I with you: you with me"(88). So he is left with no choice, but to destroy Mozart.

Yet hollow as Salieri is, he is a strong individual who is endlessly seeking a meaning in life, even on his deathbed. He finally understands God's sentence:

I must endure thirty years of being called "Distinguished" by people incapable of distinguishing! ...And finally- His masterstroke! When my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting- it would be all taken away from me. Every scrap. I must survive to see myself become extinct(93)!

But he does not accept this. Standing between God and Mozart, lost in oblivion, he decides to turn to Mozart and claim himself as his murderer, so that "for the rest of time whenever men say Mozart with love, they will say Salieri with loathing! ...I am going to be immortal after all! And He is powerless to prevent it. So, *Signore*- see now if man is mocked!"(94) We know Salieri

did not succeed in convincing people of his time that he murdered Mozart. But in the self presentation which is the play, he has clearly succeeded in presenting himself as a man talented enough to admire Mozart's music in his time, and finally passionate enough to pursue murder.

Salieri's success in ruining Mozart is not entirely a result of his own working, clever and manipulative as he is. "Notice, please, how easy my task was. Wolfgang was such an unpleasant man that my chief accomplice in the work of hindering him was easily the man himself."¹³ Mozart in *Amadeus* is indeed "an unpleasant man," one who violates the precepts of the existing order. Shaffer has obviously emphasized this aspect of his character in order to illustrate and explain his failure in his social and cultural context. Before placing Mozart in the court circle, Shaffer first illustrates the basic characteristics of the composer in a relatively private situation, though within the view of the hidden Salieri. In his first appearance dressed in "a showy wig and a showy set of clothes"(15), Mozart, although already a man of twenty-five years of age, is still very much a child, uncontrolled and passionately devoted to the cat and mouse game he is playing with Constanze. Shaffer makes him act like a cat and talk like a foul-mouthed child in order to show him as a natural man, unsophisticated and hardly socialized. Such a depiction, unpleasant as it is, is very well

¹³Shaffer, 73.

supported by documents on the real Mozart.¹⁴ The accusation made by James Fenton that Shaffer depicted Mozart "with a dreadful and offensive banality"¹⁵ is not simply wrong. It misses the point that Shaffer was making in the play.

Here the playwright has set up a sharp contrast between Salieri and Mozart: Salieri's lack of passion as the result of his ordered sterile life; and Mozart's uncontrolled overflow of passion as the result of a life dominated by intuition and instinct. The basic conflict of the play results from this difference between the two main characters. It is a conflict which has remained a constant tension in Shaffer's own mind. In Mozart Shaffer has drawn clearly "how transcendent the 'violence of instinct' can be when compared with cool 'order and restraint,'"¹⁶ for right after we see the animal infantile and uncontrolled side of the man, we hear that splended, refined music which appeared to Salieri as "a voice of God"(19). This symbolic role of Mozart is established within one scene early in the play and is consistently and systematically developed throughout the remainder.

¹⁴See Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, trans. Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1945); Michael Levey, *The Life and Death of Mozart* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971); and Henry Raynor, *Mozart* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

¹⁵James Fenton, *You Were Marvellous* (London, 1983), 30-3.

¹⁶Gianakaris, 46.

In the subsequent scenes, Shaffer places Mozart mainly in the court of Joseph II, within which Salieri has already been very successful. The society of the court is, as noted by Werner Huber and Hubert Zapf, characterized by "its unreality; it is depicted as an artificial, hypocritical, mediocre world of appearances , with 'Fetes and fireworks' (Joseph II) on the surface, and intrigues and power struggle beneath it. The inhabitants of this world are marionettes drained of all natural life, with whom Mozart necessarily comes into conflict because his emotional, outspoken, essentially autonomous individuality acts out life itself against the artificial caricature."¹⁷ When first introduced to the court, Mozart appears clearly an outsider, marked by his unique individuality and lack of concern for proper behaviour.

The banality of the court is shown in the extreme banality of its music. The Emperor, as Salieri tells us, is an "adorer of music-provided that it makes no demands upon the royal brain"(20). Accordingly, Salieri wrote the little march, which is highly appreciated by the Emperor, who considers it "exquisite"(22). However, just moments later, when Salieri and Mozart are left alone on stage, the playwright ingeniously conveys the true talent of Mozart, and the banality of the court music. Shaffer has Mozart sit down casually at the keyboard and play Salieri's March of Welcome from memory. And when he plays for the second time, he stops:

¹⁷Huber and Zapf, 307.

Mozart: It doesn't really *work*, that fourth, does it?... Let's try the third above....Ah yes!... Good! [*He repeats the new interval, leading up to it smartly with the well-known military-trumpet arpeggio which characterizes the celebrated March from The Marriage of Figaro, "Non più andrai."* Then using the interval-tentatively, delicately, one note at a time, in the treble- he steals into the famous tune itself...] (26)

With this short scene, Shaffer demonstrates the contrast between the banality of the court music and the transcendent power of Mozart's genius, "through the casual transformation of earthbound banality into immortal invention."¹⁸

Mozart's uncontrolled temperament is further illustrated by his open contempt for the superficiality of current opera. Arrogantly, he praises his coming opera as "the best, the most perfect entertainment ever offered a monarch"(23). It celebrates "manly love Not male sopranos screeching. Or stupid couples rolling their eyes. All that absurd Italian rubbish. I mean the real thing"(24). Here he not only mistakes the Emperor as his "right audience"(24), but also upsets high ranking Italian composers.

Mozart's pursuit of reality as opposed to artificiality, of German opera and "manly love" as opposed to Italian opera and courtly love, is consistently developed in the rest of the play, where we see that pursuit again and again offending convention and order. When working on *The Marriage of Figaro*, he argues with Van Swieten who "simply cannot imagine why Mozart should want to set that rubbish to music!"(56),

¹⁸ Gellatt, 14.

Mozart: Because I want to do a piece about real people, Baron! And I want to set it in a real place! A *boudoir*! Because that to me is the most exciting place on earth! Underclothes on the floor! Sheets still warm from a woman's body! Even a pisspot brimming under the bed!
Van Swieten: [*Outraged*]. Mozart!
Mozart: I want life, Baron. Not boring legends(56).

The idea of opera expressed here is once again the concept of life as passion that can be found in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Equus*. In the context of the age of Reason, Shaffer makes Mozart a unique individual by having him act against the dominant principles of his age. By crying out "I want life, not boring legends," Mozart breaks away from the order that has determined not only the nature of opera in the past one hundred years, but also the nature of society itself.

Van Swieten claims that "opera is here to ennoble us, Mozart- you and me as well as the Emperor. It is an aggrandizing art! It celebrates the eternal in man and ignores the ephemeral. The Goddess in woman and not the laundress"(56). But Mozart rejects such a view as hypocritical and the opera based on such a concept as boring:

All those anguished antiques! They are all bores! Bores, bores, bores! All serious operas written this century are boring!(57)

They are all boring because, deeply rooted in the conventional discipline of the established order, they are removed from man's immediate experiences, passions, instincts, fantasies and intuitions. They deny the nonrational forces of the human personality, the basic drives of man. In his comment on Gluck, Salieri's teacher, Mozart says:

X He's talked all his life about modernizing opera, but creates people so lofty they sound as though they shit marble(29).

The suffocating sterility and dreariness of the period in terms of music and opera are also revealed in Mozart's merciless criticism on Salieri's opera, *The Chimney Sweep*,

Mozart: Did you see his [Salieri's] last opera-*The Chimney Sweep*?... Did you?
Strack: Of course I did.
Mozart: Dogshit. Dried dogshit.
Strack: [*Outraged*] I beg your pardon!
Mozart: [*Singing*]. Pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom!
Tonic and dominant, tonic and dominant, from here to resurrection! Not one interesting modulation all night.
Salieri is a musical idiot!

... ..
Mozart: Why are Italians so terrified by the slightest complexity in music? Show them one chromatic passage and they faint! ... "Oh, how sick! How morbid!" [*Falsetto*] *Morboso!* ... *Nervoso!* ... *Ohime!*... No wonder the music at this court is so dreary(32).

It is in his realization of the sickness of his time that Mozart arrogantly claims, "I am a chevalier. The Pope made me a chevalier when I was still wetting my bed"(30), and "I am better than any musician in Vienna"(33), better because the job of a composer to him is:


to combine the inner minds of him and him and him, and her and her- the thought of chambermaids and court composers- and turn the audience into God(57-8).

The greatness of Mozart in *Amadeus* lies in his acting out that unique individuality which Shaffer celebrates, in his refusal to be part of a system which is sickening. Peter Hall, the director, recognized this unique quality of the character and noted in his diary:

...I am more and more interested in the fact that Mozart was not a revolutionary artist, but a *social*

revolutionary in a feudal world. In many respects he was the first star, the first free-lance after Handel in London. Artists at that time were servants, eating below the salt. But Mozart wanted to be a star, wanted to be recognized for his uniqueness,... He was revolutionary in that. He did not want to be just the servant of a nobleman.¹⁹

However, the rational world in the age of the enlightenment neither recognizes nor welcomes the instinctual and intuitive power of Mozart's genius. He is a threat to the existing order in which man is man only in so far as he is rational and everything can be explained by reason. As C.J. Gianakaris explains:

 In this context, Mozart was a menace to the very foundations of the then current intellectual thought. Mozart's gifts could not be accommodated in a logical system, not because of their exceptionality per se but because his dubious character would not warrant such tremendous talent as was evident.²⁰

Salieri is a true representative of his age in terms of his belief in God, his idea of the nature of the musician, and his concept of music. We have already seen that his bargain with his God is a result of cold rational calculation. And as for musicians, he claims:

Yes, we were servants. But we were learned servants. And we used our learning to celebrate men's average lives... We took unremarkable men- usually bankers, run-of the mill priests, ordinary soldiers and statesman and wives-and sacramentalized their mediocrity. We smoothed their noons with strings *divisi!* We pierced their nights with *Chiterini!* We gave them processions for their strutting, serenades for their rutting, high horns for their hunting, and drums for their wars! Trumpets

¹⁹Peter Hall, *Diaries*, ed John Goodwin(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), 465.

²⁰Gianakaris, 40.

sounded when they entered the world, and trombones groaned when they left it! The savor of their days remains behind because of *us*, our music still remembered while their politics are long forgotten (10-1)."

To perform such a duty, Salieri believes that man should "live with virtue" and "better the lot of others"(8). In other words, musicians are men of reason. Concerning the music produced by these musicians, Salieri says:

The music we wrote was endless- you can't imagine how much we had to write! Much of it was dull as stale bread. Yet all of it-*every note penned for a hundred years*- was grounded deep in the Disciplines of Beauty.... We arrived, each of us, fully trained and we built together... a vast Palace of Sound.²¹

Viewed from Salieri's perspective, Mozart, the creature, the obscene child, is not worthy of being a composer, while he, Salieri, is. If we put aside Shaffer's purpose to draw a contrast between the instinctual power of Mozart's uncontrolled passion and the sterility of the establishment, Mozart in *Amadeus* could hardly be more obnoxious. As Roland Gellatt observes:

...the Mozart in *Amadeus* is not only consistently and impolitically foul-mouthed, but also vain, arrogant, totally wrapped up in himself, and childishly insensitive to the feelings of others.²²

Not only does one find no display of social virtue in the composer, but also one discovers that he has no sexual virtue either. While demanding that his wife be faithful to him, Mozart does not behave accordingly. Even Constanze is aware of this:

²¹Shaffer, 27.

²²Gellatt, 13.

Constanze: You've had every pupil who ever came to you.
Mozart: That's not true.
Costanze: Every single female pupil!
Mozart: Name them! Name them!
Constanze: The Aurnhammer girl! The Rumbeck girl!
Katherina Cavalieri- that sly little whore! she wasn't
even your pupil- she was Salieri's- which actually, my
dear, may be why he has hundreds and you have none! He
doesn't drag them into bed(55)!

Mozart, as he is, is bound to be a social failure. His contemporaries find him obnoxious, arrogant and vulgar. And most importantly, his music in its greatness upsets the dominant convention of his age. It presents itself and its composer as a threat. Mozart does not have the support of Joseph II, whose preference is for the conventional music which is standard in his court. The Emperor preferred, Shaffer told C.J. Gianakaris in a conversation:

people who shared the common eighteenth-century language- very simple harmony. Mozart was a threat...in terms of the sound he made... .[Joseph] thought it morbid as did a lot of Viennese of his day, because of all that chromaticism. It worried him, this nervous, very nervous music. It's partly because of those suspensions and chromaticism.²³

As a result, the further Mozart develops his musical compositions as an expression of the dimension of "real life," the further he moves away from the musical standards of the day. And the further he moves away from those standards the more he upsets the order of his age and the more he increases his alienation from the society of the court. Parallel to the development of the excellence of his music is the gradual decline of his popularity, and the reduction, both physical and

²³Gianakaris, 48.

material, of the man. Ignorant of the causes of his failure, Mozart cries out in his bewilderment:

Oh, it began so well, my life. Once the world was so full, so happy!...All the journeys- all the carriages- all the rooms of smiles! Everyone smiled at me once- the King at Schonbrunn; the princess at Versailles- they lit my way with candles to the clavier- my father bowing, bowing, bowing with such joy!..."Chevalier Mozart, my miraculous son!'...Why has it all gone?...Why?...Was I so bad? So wicked?... Answer for Him and tell me(88)!

Mozart's pain is caused by his worldly failure despite the fact that he has created perfect music. Salieri's pain is the opposite of Mozart's. Ever since their first meeting, the successful court composer has been thrown into despair, realizing the emptiness of his talent and hence his existence. And to him, Mozart, the man, and his music remain a paradox that is incomprehensible. However, as a man of strong will, Salieri is determined to continue his search for certainty and justice. In his struggle with the God he previously believed in and trusted, he manifests the human desire for a sense of the divine which would give meaning to his existence. Though gifted enough to recognize the "Absolute Beauty" in Mozart's music, in no way is he able to do what Mozart does. This, too, he is able to recognize, but unable to accept.

However at the end, Salieri gains a new perception of his God,

God the restless player,...God does not help,...God does not love! He can only use! ...He cares nothing for whom he uses: nothing for whom he denies!(88)

And at the peak of his worldly success, he also becomes aware of

the true dilemma in which he is left, as his previous fears turn into reality.

...slowly I understand the nature of God's punishment!...What had I begged for in that church as a boy? Was it not fame? ... Fame for excellence? Well now I had fame! I was to become- quite simply- the most famous musician in Europe. I was to be bricked up in fame! Embalmed in fame! Buried in fame- but for work I know to be absolutely worthless(93)!

What Salieri reveals here about fame reminds us of Pizarro's similar remark, "Fame is long. Death is longer." Both of them, in their search for a meaningful existence that would immortalize them, show the ephemeral nature of fame. Both of them suffer disappointment as a result of their inability to transcend their earthly existence by mastering the divine which is manifested in their counterparts, Atahualpa and Mozart. However, when Salieri feels cheated by his God, unlike Pizarro and Dysart who are relatively passive, he devises his own means to gain immortality by spreading the rumour that he has poisoned Mozart, believing "I am going to be immortal after all"(94). And he accepts what he can, declaring himself "Salieri: Patron saint of Mediocrities"(95), when the Viennese of the time were not convinced that Salieri, the man who "was respected, honoured, admired and decorated," would commit such a murder. His temporary fame works against his plan for immortal fame. What is left to him is his painful realization of his mediocrity in the world of the mediocre.

Mediocrities everywhere- now and to come- I absolve you all. Amen(96)!

As Daniel R. Jones notes, Salieri's "final gesture of

self-sanctification" is not mockery but homage, an act of humility. Salieri who desired only to be "owned- ordered- exhausted by an Absolute" "affirms what he can."²⁴

In *Amadeus*, through Mozart Shaffer celebrates the nonrational forces of the human personality which help man transcend his mundane existence. However, he also shows sympathy for Salieri, the character who not only manifests the human desire for certainty, order and stability but also hopes to achieve spiritual fulfillment by following that desire. Although Shaffer sympathizes with his protagonist for the spirit exhibited in his quest, he does not share his belief that the virtuous man of order and reason can be the agent of the divine. *Amadeus* says that the "unpleasant" men, the rejectors of social convention, are the brilliant artists, the bearers of the divine. The virtues of a Salieri are only social virtues and prove to be of only social use. They make it easier to climb the social ladder, but in no way can they move one up the ladder of artistic creation which leads one to the divine.

²⁴Jones, 153.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Shaffer has been obsessed with the tension between society and the individual. In his three most successful plays, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, and *Amadeus*, he has consistently illustrated the defects of society, and condemned it for its regimental nature which either castrates or suppresses the individual, leaving no room for his spiritual fulfillment. In each of the three plays, middle age and youth are in opposition, and yet in each both middle age and youth are the victims of what society expects of them: the maintenance of its only interest, i.e., to protect its norms and conventional order.

The young characters, Atahualpa, Alan and Mozart, are filled with a sense of the divine through their association with the sun, the horse and absolute beauty in music respectively. Their lives guided by the irrationality of instinct and intuition, represent the splendor of a commonly denied and thus unlived necessary part of every man's life. However, as deviants from social norms and conventional order, society demands that they be punished. This results in their early death, physical or spiritual. In the case of Atahualpa, it is physical; in the case of Alan, it is spiritual; In Mozart's, it is both.

The middle-aged characters are also victims of society. Because they are defined by its conventions, their pursuit of worldly success leads them only to spiritual devastation. In *The*

Royal Hunt of the Sun, Pizarro, in his life previous to the Peruvian expedition, devoted himself to goals set up by his own culture: high social position, fame, material wealth for himself; new territory for Spain. He ignored the development of his private life. However, after he has achieved all these goals in his middle age, he has time to reflect and is wise enough to realize that he is successful only in the sense defined by his material-oriented society. He has achieved nothing for his private life. With this recognition, it becomes obvious to him that his previous ideals are no longer enough for him as he approaches death, and he becomes increasingly concerned with finding a deeper meaning for his existence. In *Equus*, the middle-aged doctor, Dysart, is also defined by society. He is very successful in his profession as a doctor, in fact considered the best by Hesther. In his analysis of Alan's case, realizing that he is confined by his education and society's expectations, he, too, struggles to find a meaning for his life beyond his worldly success. And in *Amadeus*, Salieri, another middle-aged protagonist like Pizarro and Dysart, has also achieved enormous worldly success. He is the court composer favoured by the Emperor and highly respected by his contemporaries. He lives with gold. However, when he meets Mozart, he realizes that his previous goals are no longer enough, for without the creation of absolute music his fame will not survive his death.

Defined by social convention, all three cannot divorce themselves completely from its beliefs, although they recognize that their lives are empty and that they are masters of their fate only in a very modest degree, despite whatever worldly success they have achieved. Unable to create spiritually, they still hold onto the false ideals which they have come to question and reject mentally. Pizarro can not forget about the fame he had in mind when he started the expedition. Nor can he forget his duty to his soldiers who are in danger. Dysart is in fear of the consequences the deviant will suffer, for in his readjustment business he knows exactly what society will do to such a person. Salieri can in no way stop his desire for fame, the pursuit of which has defined his entire life. Because of their inability to escape, all three still function on behalf of society and punish the deviants who do.

The destructive nature of society is also clearly illustrated in the middle-aged protagonists' sexual habits. Pizarro is ineffective around women. He tells De Soto that "the only women who would have had me weren't the sort you married."¹ He bewails the fact that "I used to look after women with hope, but they didn't have much time for me."² His only sexual relationship with a woman (which he fondly recalls, was "the best hour of my life."³) ended in sorrow. Initially, his

¹Shaffer, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 31.

²Shaffer, 31.

³Shaffer, 31.

failure is due, in part, to the poverty of his origin, but this is not Shaffer's main point, for later Pizarro does rise to worldly success and continues to fail sexually. The same point is made more clearly in *Equus*. Dysart is sterile. His physical inability to procreate symbolizes his inability to create spiritually. In *Amadeus*, Salieri, another middle-aged protagonist, has consciously repressed his sexual desire for the sake of his pursuit of worldly fame. This repression he calls sexual virtue, according to which he has deliberately chosen a "respectable wife" who is "conspicuous" in her "lack of fire." The only passion he has is for sweetmeats. In fact, he is referred to by Mozart as someone who is impotent in both the physical and the creative sense. "That's the sound of someone who can't get it up."⁴ The middle-aged characters' inability to function sexually points directly to society's spiritual castration of the individual.

However, castrated though Pizarro, Dysart and Salieri are, they gain a new understanding of their personal life through their confrontation with the life of the young, who are untainted by society and filled with a sense of the divine. Consequently, all three clearly see their sexual deprivation as a painful sacrifice. It is this understanding that separates them from their social role, and makes them stand with one foot rooted in the conventional, normal and institutionalized world and the other hopelessly trying to step onto the newly found

⁴Shaffer, *Amadeus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 55.

ground.

For about thirty years, Shaffer has been continuously engaged in the dramatization of the failure of society to provide the individual with spiritual fulfillment.⁵ The popularity of the three plays shows that the playwright's dramatization of a personal obsession has captured the common spiritual mood. In the enterprise of transforming private experience into a fascinating public event, Shaffer has found enormous success, the key to which is his belief that:

a great playwright must believe that we are each other in one basic sense. Assuming that I were Shakespear, my basic assumption could be said to be that I am an almanac of, an encyclopaedia of, all possible human experience, ratios and equivalents; that I can indeed feel, or should be able to feel, that I am an encyclopaedia of human experience—that I take this strand out of this play and I follow it and by doing this I hope to relate totally to my audience because there is everything of them in me and there is everything of me in them. It is subjective at first, ultimately it becomes objective when it's made a work of art.⁶

Though he has offered no solution, he has made his audience aware of the defects of existing social values through the

⁵As stated by Michael Billington in his article on *Yonadab* in *The Guardian*, 6 Dec. 1985, *Shrivings* and *Yonadab*, two other plays by Shaffer, investigate the same issues as the three plays being discussed here. Thematically, they form a group. However, *Shrivings* does not belong to Shaffer's "theatre of ritual and masks and cries and ritual magic, incorporating music." And it failed to produce the same effect upon the theatregoers as the other plays. Shaffer himself believed it "fell somewhere between domesticity and grandeur." (Peter Shaffer, "A Note on the Play: 1974" *Shrivings* (London: André Deutsch, 1974), 7.) The thesis does not deal with *Yonadab* simply because its text has not yet been published, although there exist some reviews and articles on the play.

⁶Shaffer, "Artaud for Artaud's sake," 26.

agonizing insight offered by his middle-aged mediating characters. And he has called upon the members of his audience to offer their own personal solutions in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment and avoid the failure of his protagonists. In the process he is superb not only in utilizing dramatic techniques, but also in dramatizing important ideas.

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